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12 The Road To Tempe

Nebraska's second-half recovery at Kansas was a key point in an 11-1 season. *By Mike Babcock*

ON THE COVER

Sophomore defensive tackle Jason Lohr sacks Texas quarterback Major Applewhite. *Photo by Scott Bruhn*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Disappearing Offense?

As a lifetime Husker fan born and living in Texas, this victory in the Big 12 Championship was so, so sweet.

The Blackshirts played an outstanding game and produced an incredible recruiting film for some time to come.

But . . . where did the offense go after the third-quarter touchdown? Where were the pancake blocks and holes of the first half? What about some passes beyond 2-3 yards? Three plays and punt, three plays and punt, three plays and punt. The real story of the second half offense. We're real lucky to have such a great defense.

How about some real investigative analysis and reporting instead of the usual fluff pieces?

Craig Jeffery
Dallas, Texas

Coach Frank Solich admitted he went conservative on offense in the second half, figuring the lead was sufficient given the way the defense was playing. Also, the Huskers were pretty beat up physically by the second half, and there was no reason to get fancy. For Solich's explanation, check out the Game Recap, which starts on Page 20. — Editor

A Bunch Of BCS

Bravo to Virginia Tech . . . Tech, for pulling off the David Copperfield Illusion of the year. The Hokies somehow fooled the BCS computer into sending them to the national championship game, rather than a much more deserving Nebraska team. No truth to the rumor that the BCS computer is the twin-brother of the computer used in the recent Mars probe.

The BCS was designed to match the two best teams in the country, not the teams with the two best records. (For reference, see "BYU 1984"). Unfortunately, conventional wisdom was tossed out on its ear during this year's selection process. Led by ESPN's own rocket scientist, Lee Corso, ESPN's College Gameday crew feverishly cheered Tech's march toward infamy. Unfortunately, nobody stopped to notice that Tech had loaded up on a schedule that was so weak that it would have made Kansas State blush. Tech polished off perennial I-AA (that's slang for "Little League") power, James Madison, Alabama-Birmingham, Temple, Rutgers and a sleuth of other toothless

wonders. For their efforts, the Hokies were presented with the keys to the kingdom.

A federal probe is warranted.

On the other end of the spectrum, Nebraska fought against five behemoths currently ranked in the top 20. They finished 11-1. Their only loss was by four points at Texas. By contrast, how many of Tech's games were against teams currently ranked in the top 20? Zero. That's right, zero, as in "why play anybody tough, if the computer only cares about your won-loss percentage?" Yes, Tech did show poise when it needed a last-second field goal to fend off West Virginia . . . and its 2-6 record. The argument that Tech "did all that it could have done" is as credible as a three dollar bill. Tech could have done more. For starters, the Hokies could have at least scheduled games against teams who play 11-man football.

Unfortunately, we have all been robbed of a classic matchup of Florida State vs. Nebraska, for the title of the '90s. Instead, we are being spoon-fed Frank Beamer, Michael Vick and the rest of the Techsters. Lest you get caught up in the hype, don't forget that everybody once believed in the worthiness of an undefeated Gerry Cooney, Bill Buckner as a defensive

replacement and Steve Young's IQ.

Let's hope that the Mars probe is lost, so that we can ship the BCS computer up to replace it. It's too late this year, but hopefully all parties will come back to earth next year.

Craig P. Fagan
San Diego, Calif.

Volleyball A Class Act

I'd just like to say that Nebraska volleyball is the greatest, and it is nice because the ladies are appreciative of their fans, and they show it after most home games when they sign autographs for their young fans and talk to anyone.

It is very nice to see in this day and age.

Chuck & Karen Wilcoxon

Got Something To Say?

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EDITOR,
GENERAL MANAGER
Brian Hill

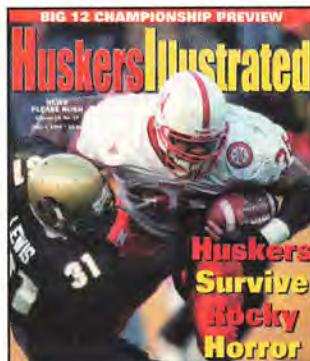
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Mike Babcock

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
James Hale, Todd Henrichs, Curt McKeever, Bob Schaller, Steve Sipple, Nebraska Sports Information Office

CONTRIBUTING
PHOTOGRAPHERS
Scott Bruhn, Nebraska Sports Information Office

SPORTS MARKETING
& ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
Jeff Tuder

NATIONAL DISTRIBUTOR
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HI Online

<http://www.huskersillustrated.com>

E-Mail Addresses

Editor: Heditor@aol.com

Advertising/marketing: jtuder@navix.net

Changing Places

Quarterback lining up at wide receiver not so unusual

A quarterback is a quarterback, except when he's not. Nebraska fans got some insight into that position paradox in the Cornhuskers' second game of the season against California.

Eric Crouch, still the No. 2 quarterback at the time, lined up at wide receiver and teamed with Bobby Newcombe on a 60-yard touchdown pass play late in the second quarter.

There was a time when a quarterback lining up at wide receiver would have been considered unusual, but "not so much any more," according to Nebraska coach Frank Solich.

"I think at one time you would maybe look at that as unique," he said.

"But I would not look at it that way now. I would just look at it, to some degree, as a coach doing everything he can to reach the potential that his offense or his defense has."

If rover and kick returner Joe Walker hadn't been sidelined by a knee injury early in the season, Solich



Eric Crouch caught a 60-yard touchdown pass from Bobby Newcombe vs. California.

might have allowed him to play wide receiver on occasion.

Walker had approached him about playing some offense, and Solich was willing to listen. "I think coaches want to get the ball in the hands of the big-play makers," he said.

"And they will go to all extremes to get that done. If teams have a special player, they'll try to do as much as possible. Sometimes that means lining them up at a lot of different places."

Because of that, and as defenses become more sophisticated, traditional position distinctions are breaking down. Florida

State, for example, has had four different players take snaps in some games, and only two of the four, Chris Weinke and Marcus Outzen, were quarterbacks.

Flanker Peter Warrick and fullback Dan Kendra also have taken snaps, Warrick in shotgun formation and Kendra, who was recruited as a quarterback, on short-yardage downs. "I think it can be done, and it is being done," Solich said of situations dictating who will take the snap from center.

"But it depends on so many factors."

Some teams, most notably Florida, have alternated quarterbacks, an approach Solich decided against when he was trying to determine whether Crouch or Newcombe would be his starter.

Often, the quarterbacks involved prefer not to alternate, which was the case with Crouch and Newcombe. They wanted a starter to be named to be able to "zero in," said Solich.

"If things are going fine, that's probably the way it is. But there is no question we could revert a little bit to both guys getting snaps at quarterback and being utilized a little at receiver. And it could probably work well. I had mixed emotions

about not having both of them stay at quarterback."

Having two quarterbacks with the abilities of Crouch and Newcombe allows for "having a guy with fresh legs on the field at all times, at a very valuable position for you," Solich said.

"So there are advantages, really, both ways. And it can work both ways. Sometimes you just go with the system that you think is the best for the mental approach your kids' are going to take."

Newcombe has continued to take snaps in practice, in case Crouch were to be injured, and Solich might at some point put Newcombe in the shotgun formation to get the ball in his hands.

"We would consider that," said Solich. "And we have considered that."

Such a move might raise some eyebrows, "but I don't think you can make decisions based on that," Solich said. "I think you've just got to make the decision based on what's best for the players and the team in terms of moving the ball. And sometimes it's going to mean doing the unordinary or uncommon thing instead of just lining them up in one spot and playing traditional football with them." ■

CROUCH EARNS RESPECT OF TEXAS COACH, SHARES AWARD AS OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Sophomore quarterback Eric Crouch has earned the respect of Texas coach Mack Brown. "I've been around some great option quarterbacks, but I think Crouch is the best I've seen," he said.

Crouch, who led the nation's quarterbacks in rushing and touchdowns, shared the conference coaches' award as Offensive Player of the Year with Texas quarterback Major Applewhite.

Nebraska's other coaches' All-Big 12 first-team selections were: tight end Tracey Wistrom, center Dominic Raiola, nose guard Steve Warren, middle linebacker Carlos Polk, rover Mike Brown and cornerback Ralph Brown. Offensive guard Russ Hochstein, punt returner Bobby Newcombe and punter

Dan Hadenfeldt were second-team. Weakside linebacker Julius Jackson was third-team.

Kansas State linebacker Mark Simoneau was the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year. Oklahoma quarterback Josh Heupel was the Offensive Newcomer of the Year. Kansas State defensive tackle Mario Fatafehi was the Defensive Newcomer of the Year. Texas Tech running back Shaud Williams was the Offensive Freshman of the Year. And Texas tackle Cory Redding was the Defensive Freshman of the Year.

Mike Brown, Ralph Brown, Polk, Warren, Wistrom and Hochstein were first-team selections on the Associated Press All-Big 12 team. Ralph Brown was Nebraska's only repeat selection.

'COACH OF DECADE'

Former Nebraska Coach Tom Osborne was chosen the Home Depot college football "Coach of the Decade," an honor he received in Buena Vista, Fla., at a ceremony televised by the ESPN cable network.

Strongside linebacker Brian Shaw also appeared on the show as a finalist for the Burger King Scholar-Athlete of the Year award. Shaw was the award winner for Division I-A.

The senior and walkon from Deweese, Neb., had a 4.0 cumulative grade-point average in an animal science and agricultural economics major. "I started to get the pressure to keep my 4.0 my junior year, I guess," he said. However, "I don't get too worried about classes, I guess."

Shaw earned \$36,000 for Nebraska's general scholarship fund through his academic success. Earning the Division I-A award from Burger King accounted for \$25,000 of that total.

"I don't get to see this money myself, which would be nice," he said, joking.

A perfect cumulative grade-point average wasn't enough to earn Shaw a place on the GTE/CoSIDA Academic All-America first team. He was a second-team selection.

However, for the third season in a row, Nebraska was represented on the first team by two players: senior rover Mike Brown and junior rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch. Brown has a 3.34 grade-point average, and Vanden Bosch has a 3.78 grade-point average. Both are business administration majors.

It was the 14th consecutive season that Nebraska had at least one first-team Academic All-American. Brown also was a first-team All-America selection by the Football Writers Association of America.



Tom Osborne Fl., at a ceremony televised by the ESPN cable network.

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

FIESTA BOWL EXPERIENCES VARY FOR HUSKERS

The Fiesta Bowl has been the best of times and the worst of times for Nebraska.

The Cornhuskers completed an undefeated season and were unanimously voted national champions following their 62-24 victory against Florida in the 1996 Fiesta Bowl game.

Florida went into the game, billed the "Duel in the Desert," undefeated and ranked No. 2.

A 29-point second quarter by Nebraska, however, eliminated the suspense.

The victory, a school-record 25th, ended a four-game Cornhusker losing streak in the Fiesta Bowl, beginning with a 17-14 upset loss against Arizona State in 1975.

That game, the fifth in Fiesta Bowl history, gave the bowl national credibility.

Nebraska ended up in the Fiesta Bowl in 1975 because of a 35-10 loss at Oklahoma in the final game of the regular season. The Cornhuskers went into the game undefeated and ranked second in the nation, with hopes of playing for the national championship in the Orange Bowl game.

As a result, the Nebraska players voted beforehand that if they were to lose to No. 7-ranked and once-beaten Oklahoma, they wouldn't accept a bowl bid. It would be the Orange Bowl or nothing.

Oklahoma, on the other hand, had agreed to play in the Fiesta Bowl if they lost to Nebraska.

After the game, the Cornhuskers held to their decision to reject all bowl bids. The Tangerine Bowl also was reportedly interested in them, as an opponent for Miami of Ohio.

The players relented, however, and a day later, Nebraska announced that it would accept the Fiesta Bowl bid to play the champion of the Western Athletic Conference.

Arizona State defeated Arizona the next week to win the title.

The Sun Devils had played in, and won, the first three Fiesta Bowl games.

The game would be undefeated Arizona State's "chance to once and for all crash the 'big time' in collegiate football circles," according to the official game program.

That proved prophetic. The Sun Devils finished second in both the Associated Press and United Press International polls, behind repeat national champion Oklahoma.

Nebraska returned to the Fiesta Bowl after the 1985 season and returned after the 1987 and 1989 seasons, losing to Michigan (27-23) and Florida State twice (31-28 and 41-17).

BRIEFLY NOTED

— Husker junior Nancy Meendering was named Big 12 volleyball Player of the Year. Meendering was a unanimous pick on the all-conference first team, along with freshman Greichaly Cepero.

Cepero also was chosen as the conference Freshman of the Year.

Junior Angie Oxley and freshman Amber Holmquist received all-conference honorable mention.

— Former Cornhusker Ryan Held is a graduate assistant coach at Tennessee. Held, a walkon, played wide receiver at Nebraska and then served as a graduate assistant, working with the defense.

— Tom Osborne spent a day in early December at the University of Houston as an unpaid consultant to the Cougars' football program, spurring rumors that he might be pursuing the head coach's job.

Kim Helton was fired from the position in November.

Osborne told the Omaha World-Herald he made the trip to Houston as a favor to former Nebraskans Chris Bahl and Bill Doleman, both of whom are now associated with the university.

Bahl is the school's associate athletic director for external relations. Doleman, who wrote a column for Huskers Illustrated, does television play-by-play for the Cougars.

— University of Nebraska senior defenders Sharoita Nonen and Isabelle Morneau claimed All-America honors when the teams were announced by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America on Friday, Dec. 10. Nonen, who earned 1999 Big 12 Conference Player-of-the-Year honors, became the second player in school history to capture NSCAA/adidas First-Team All-America accolades. Morneau was named to the third team.

— Husker swimmer and Stockholm, Sweden, native Therese Alshammar broke three world records in two days in winning the 50-meter freestyle (:24.09), 100-meter freestyle (:52.80) and swimming on Sweden's record-setting 200-meter freestyle relay (1:38.45) at the 1999 European Short Course Championships. Alshammar is redshirting this season in order to train in Europe for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. ■

FROM THE EDITOR

Big 12 Title Caps Fine '99

Championships in volleyball, soccer add to Nebraska's fall success story



**Brian
HILL**

NO MATTER HOW the Jan. 2 Fiesta Bowl turns out, it's been a great year. And not just for football.

Nebraska's sweep of the football, volleyball and soccer championships in the fall was a first for the four-year-old Big 12 Conference.

Beating Texas for the Big 12 title in football was especially satisfying for the Huskers and their fans because it hadn't happened since the new conference was formed.

The streak began in the first Big 12 championship game at St. Louis in 1996 (37-27) and included the Longhorns' ending Nebraska's 47-game home winning streak last season (20-16) as well as this season's loss at Austin (24-20).

The losing streak "probably bothered a lot of people more than it has bothered me," NU Coach Frank Solich said. "I wanted to win every one of them. But they've all been great football games. And we had our chances in each of those."

Nebraska had not defeated Texas since the 1974 Cotton Bowl (19-3).

The Huskers' accomplishments, on the heels of a 9-4 season, didn't go unnoticed elsewhere, either, as Solich was named Big 12 Coach of the Year.

Solich has said that following a legend like Tom Osborne has been maybe even more difficult than he expected.

John Cook takes on a similar challenge. Cook, who returned to Nebraska this year as associate head coach, will take over for Terry Pettit, who guided the Huskers to 694 victories and six Final Fours in 23 seasons. The move had been rumored since Cook's hiring, and Pettit confirmed it just before this edition went to press. Contributing editor Mike Babcock attended the Dec. 14 press conference and has the story on Page 32.

Also inside, you'll find coverage of the Big 12 championship game, a look back at the 1999 season, a preview of the Fiesta Bowl matchup with Tennessee and a whole lot more.

Happy Holidays. ■

Season's Greetings!

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Solich-Osborne Comparisons Inevitable

Second-year coach has gained insight into predecessor's ability to deal with media



Mike Babcock

FIRST, A SHORT LESSON in recent college football history.

Barry Switzer coached his final season at Oklahoma in 1988. He was followed, in order, by Gary Gibbs, Howard Schnellenberger, John Blake and Bobby Stoops, the current coach.

The Sooners have enjoyed varying degrees of success since Switzer's forced departure, but never enough to produce job security for those who have come after him.

Replacing a legend is difficult, as the Oklahoma situation illustrates. It usually takes at least a couple of seasons, as well as a couple of hirings, to effect the transition. The immediate successor rarely survives the way Tom Osborne did when he replaced Bob Devaney after the 1972 season.

Osborne not only survived, he continued Devaney's success. He and Devaney were the first major-college football coaches to record 100 victories in consecutive careers at the same school.

And both are enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame.

In mid-December, Osborne was chosen as the college football coach of the decade. His record for the decade (eight seasons) was 79-11-1, with three national championships in his final five seasons. His record in those five seasons was a combined 60-3, which you probably already know.

Frank Solich knows, if not the exact numbers, definitely their effect.

Following Osborne as head coach at Nebraska is "certainly everything I thought it would be, and maybe then some," he said before the Big 12 playoff against Texas.

"I've got tremendous appreciation for Tom and how he was able to do it for so many years, being the head coach and also serving as the offensive coordinator."

In addition, Solich has gained insight into Osborne's unique ability to deal with reporters on a daily basis. "I think just as you go into a football game with kind of a philosophy of how you're going to approach it, you've got to go into a press conference with a philosophy," he said.

"What seems like almost something that won't take time, that you can just walk in, sit down and start talking football, is not quite the way it is. It all takes time. And I knew that.

"But I've got an even greater appreciation for how Tom handled it."

Osborne's handling of reporters came with time. He wasn't gregarious, the way Devaney was, and he was never overly comfortable with the constant news media attention that goes with being in charge of something as important to the community, and state, as Nebraska football.



In his second year, Frank Solich was named Big 12 Coach of the Year.

Solich is like Osborne in that sense, which probably makes the job a little more difficult. Devaney could divert bothersome questions by responding with the good-old-boy humor that was his trademark. Solich treats every reporter's question seriously, just as Osborne did.

After being named Big 12 coach of the year, Solich was asked if he would have voted for himself for that award based on his decision to run an option late in regulation of the Colorado game.

Nebraska lost a fumble on the play, and almost lost the game because of it.

Solich spent a couple of minutes explaining his reasoning for the option and pointing out he had called other plays that might have seemed out of the ordinary but were just as important in the overtime against Colorado, before concluding: "After saying all that, I wouldn't run it again."

Solich is expected not only to win but also to justify how the victories are achieved, which is why, before launching into his extended answer, he said he expected the question.

That realization has contributed to his second season as head coach being considerably more difficult than his first, even though reason would seem to suggest it should be easier.

Nevertheless, Solich has survived, and fashioned a record that ranks this team with the best non-national championship teams in Cornhusker history. With a victory against Tennessee in the Fiesta Bowl game, Nebraska would finish 12-1, and most likely be ranked second in the nation.

Osborne didn't achieve that level of success until his 10th season, when a controversial call at Penn State cost the Cornhuskers an opportunity to play for the national championship.

Although Solich should be judged on his own merits, such comparisons to Osborne are inevitable, and so far favorable. Osborne wasn't chosen conference coach of the year until his third season.

"A lot of times I don't think it takes wins to do an excellent coaching job," Solich said. "I look at our staff and I look at our football team last year, and I think they did a very good job, in a lot of ways. We weren't able to put the wins on the board, but sometimes that can't be controlled."

"Sometimes there are elements that take you out of, maybe, having the ability to get it done quite at the level you want. I guess I've been around this profession long enough to know that an award such as this is really a reflection of the type of players you have and also a reflection of your staff."

"So that award, to me, really goes to everyone in the program."

Osborne would have said the same thing. He often did, in fact. ■

Many Contribute To Ground Effort

Gillespie says offensive line, elusive quarterback Crouch have helped jumpstart rushing attack



**Bob
SCHALLER**

THE HUSKER OFFENSE has rolled — on the ground, even — as Nebraska made its climb back up the rankings after the stubbed toe in Austin.

"Everyone is in the right frame of mind right now," said Husker offensive tackle Jon Rutherford. "It seems like everything's been working out just right. Our execution has been good."

The Huskers rushed for 234 yards during the 22-6 romp over the Longhorns in the Big 12 Championship game. That's a far cry from the team that seemed content to drop the option and focus on creating a passing game earlier this season against the likes of Southern Mississippi (which ended up a top 20 team, at No. 14).

The I-backs have been carrying their load. Last week, it was Dan Alexander with 180 yards (along with Eric Crouch passing the century mark with 123 yards on 19 carries). A couple of months ago, it was Dahrran Diedrick with 99 yards. In San Antonio, it was Correll Buckhalter with 136 yards on 20 carries, while Crouch had 72 yards on 23 carries.

Running back coach Dave Gillespie was proud of his backs, plus fullback Willie Miller, who rushed eight times for 17 yards, including a 9-yarder, despite playing with a shoulder sprain.

"This says so much about these kids," Gillespie said. "Every day, one or more of them is ready to get it done. Willie was in some pain. But he still played hard."

While it might seem like the Husker offense struggled once again in the second half (as it did against CU), the numbers from both halves against Texas are similar. NU rushed for 131 yards in the first half against UT and 104 in the second half.

"I don't think we slowed down any in the second half," Crouch said. "(Texas) was doing some stuff differently. We got it all straightened out and got some drives going."

The fumbling problem, though better — Nebraska lost just one fumble Saturday, but Diedrick's gaff was returned for a touchdown — is still a problem.

"I still feel bad for Dahrran," Gillespie said. "But he will bounce back."

Buckhalter could relate.

"This year, the fumble has plagued us like a virus," Buckhalter said. "But we haven't let the turnovers get us down. It's been a bit of an execution problem at times, and it's been not holding onto the ball at times. But we're



Running backs coach Dave Gillespie is proud of the way his backs have played.

working on it. I even thought about it out there today — 'Never fumble,' I said to myself."

Gillespie credits the offensive line — and the elusive Crouch.

"Obviously, it all starts with the offensive line," Gillespie said. "They've played very physical football and gotten after other people."

"And when you have Eric back there at quarterback, he's a threat on every play," Gillespie added. "He's got a lot of heart and a lot of desire. He's just a tremendously tough kid, somewhat of an iron man. Everyone has a lot of respect for him."

Crouch earned even more respect with another long TD run — this one from 31 yards out in the Big 12 title game.

"It was a play where we fake to our fullback," said Husker coach Frank Solich. "We felt that we needed to do something different with the guys up in the middle in this game — different than the first game. We brought the I-back up to block, so we had an extra blocker for Eric."

"The fake was a good fake, and any time you have people unsure of where the ball is, Eric — with his speed — has the chance to make a big play, and he did."

Offensive line coach Milt Tenopir said the line has refocused on the option, seeking instead to go different directions, albeit it still on the ground.

"We've changed a few things and come up with some things off tackle," Tenopir said. "We caught Texas reeling on a few plays today. With Buckhalter and Eric, we really had some plays break big."

Buckhalter broke open for a 55-yard run against the Longhorns, while Crouch scored on the 31-yard play, darting through the line before breaking it outside and into the end zone.

"We've been getting stronger all year," said offensive guard Russ Hochstein. "We've shown a lot of determination and resiliency. As far as the backs, they are committed to pushing hard and getting that extra yard. It's a matter of us wanting to get after it."

"Teams have come inside on us a lot more, so we've opened it up and done some running to the outside with the tackles. But a lot of it has to do with the line's maturity and coming together." ■

Bob Schaller covers the Huskers for the Scottsbluff Star-Herald. He has also written several books, including "Touchdown Tommie" and "Roar of Silence: The Kenny Walker Story." Bob can be reached at schallerrc@aol.com.

Winning Formula Wasn't Calculus

Texas quarterback didn't help his cause with remark about Nebraska's defense



**Curt
McKEEVER**

TEXAS QUARTERBACK Major Applewhite was right. Reading Nebraska's defense doesn't compare to calculus. But, as was evident during the Cornhuskers' 22-6 win in the Big 12 Conference championship, simple math can sometimes be just as challenging.

The formula used by defensive coordinator Charlie McBride had little to do with outsmarting the Longhorns.

Borrowing some pages from Kansas State's successful day against UT earlier this season, Nebraska just overloaded Texas with a variety of blitzes that had Applewhite running for cover or being lassoed like a scared calf at a rodeo.

Texas' offense got no closer than the Husker 22-yard line and failed to produce points for the first game in 14 seasons.

Applewhite was sacked seven times and failed to reach 200 yards passing for the first time as a starter.

And the Longhorns finished with a school-record low 6 yards rushing.

But deep in the heart of Texas, inside San Antonio's Alamodome, this result had as much to do with scowl as it did scheme.

The Huskers knew they were out of the national championship picture, and they knew the main reason was because they lost to the Longhorns on Oct. 23. That explains part of the reason why they had so much steam from start to finish.

And then there was the Applewhite factor. Although he meant no harm, the sophomore didn't help his team's cause by detailing to a Sports Illustrated writer after Texas' 24-20 win against NU that figuring out the Huskers' defense wasn't exactly calculus.

"I don't know if he was confused, but he was pressured," said linebacker Tony Ortiz, who had one of Nebraska's three interceptions. "It's not if you can see (what you're facing), it's if you have time to do anything against it."

The Big 12 championship let Nebraska gain some revenge for three straight losses to Texas. Two of those cost the Huskers a chance to play for the national championship.

As strong as NU looked in San Antonio, calls for a college football playoff are sure to be rekindled. It happens nearly every season.

While unbeatens Florida State and Virginia Tech will play for all the marbles at the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 4,

Nebraska gets a nice consolation prize, with a Jan. 2 Fiesta Bowl date against 1998 national champion Tennessee.

The way they played against Texas, you'd find few who'd bet against the Huskers — whether the opponent be Tennessee or the two teams playing in New Orleans.

"I don't know if I'm a proponent of a playoff system or not. At one time, I thought I was," NU Coach Frank Solich said. "I can see advantages and disadvantages on either side. The thing that you wonder about is how our football team would hold up."

"Right now, if we were asked to go into a playoff system, we'd be without a share of the guys who got us to this point."

Nebraska didn't have All-Big 12 tight end Tracey Wistrom against Texas because of a knee injury. I-back Dan Alexander left the game after suffering a cut to his right hand that took 13 stitches to close. I-back Correll Buckhalter was left recovering from turf toe. Fullback Willie Miller and wide receiver Wilson Thomas suffered separated shoulders. Offensive guard Adam Julch was gimpy with a thigh bruise. And cornerback Ralph Brown dislocated one thumb and sprained the other.

But with a second league championship in three years secured, and now a great opportunity to build more momentum for 2000, you can be sure those players will not want to miss the start of the new millennium.

"This game should be every bit as good and exciting as the Florida State-Virginia Tech game will be," Solich said. "I think both teams would like more, but both teams know there is a lot on the line, and they'll give it their best shot."

Yes, things could be better for the Huskers. Give them a couple plays back (or a couple more points in the Bowl Championship Series standings), and they'd be headed to New Orleans instead of Tempe, Ariz. But considering their recent plight against Texas, who's to say the Big 12 championship wasn't just as good as a national crown?

"They finally got a taste of real Nebraska football," said senior rover and co-captain Mike Brown, who broke up five of Applewhite's passes and intercepted one. "We dominated them for four quarters. We shut 'em down."

"End of story." ■



Major Applewhite was constantly under pressure from the Nebraska defense.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

Anxious Moments in Kansas

Huskers' second-half recovery was key point in 11-1 season

Nebraska came to its senses at the start of the second half of the Kansas game.

On the first play from scrimmage, Eric Crouch passed to Matt Davison on a play that gained 63 yards, or nearly as many as the Cornhuskers had gained in the entire first half.

And on the second play, Correll Buckhalter gained 3 yards to the Kansas 14-yard line.

On the third play, however, Dan Alexander lost a fumble at the 1-yard line.

Kansas led 9-0, and though plenty of time remained in the game, the situation was disconcerting for the thousands of Nebraska fans that had made the short trip to Lawrence, Kan.

The Cornhuskers were still trying to shake the emotional hangover of a 24-20 loss at Texas the previous week. And it was beginning to look as if the unthinkable might happen.

By the end of the third quarter, Nebraska had taken a 10-9 lead, which increased to 17-9, before a 77-yard touchdown pass play and two-point conversion produced more anxious moments.

That was the last hurrah for Kansas, however. Crouch and Bobby Newcombe combined on a 49-yard touchdown pass with 3:24 remaining, and Nebraska escaped with a 24-17 victory.

In retrospect, that game was pivotal in the Cornhuskers' success.

"I felt it was a key point in our season because they were hard-pressed emotionally to get to where they could play at the level they had been playing at," Coach Frank Solich said.

"It wasn't until the second half that they really came out of the doldrums they were in."

It wasn't until the second half that they "showed tremendous character. From that point on, I think it was a football team that had tremendous heart and showed (it) every time," said Solich.

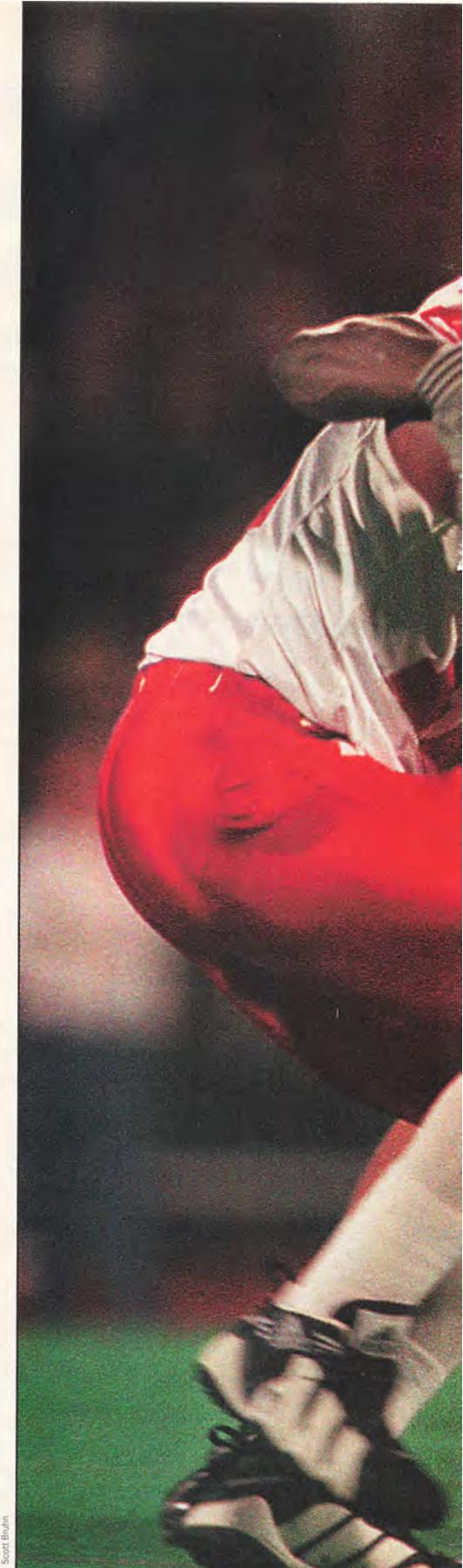
Actually, Nebraska's character had been tested early in the season, when the Cornhuskers fell behind Southern Mississippi 13-12 at Memorial Stadium in their third game.

A mishandled pitch on the first play from scrimmage in the second half gave Southern Mississippi the ball at the Nebraska 20-yard line. And five plays later the Golden Eagles took the lead.

Nebraska needed heart and determination, as well as a 28-yard interception return for a touchdown by weakside linebacker Julius Jackson, to avert an embarrassing upset that afternoon.

The Cornhuskers were still trying to get in a rhythm offensively. The Southern Mississippi game was their first with Crouch as the starting quarterback and Newcombe at wingback.

The next three weeks, Nebraska got into it, with lopsided victories



Scott Brahm

against Missouri (40-10), Oklahoma State (38-14) and Iowa State (49-14). Then came the Texas game, after a week off. And then came serious questions about the direction in which the Cornhuskers were head-



Bobby Newcombe returned a punt 86 yards for a touchdown and caught a 49-yard touchdown pass from Eric Crouch in the second half of the Kansas game.

ed.

"They were stung pretty good by the loss," Solich said during a news

conference three days later. "The game this past week, as you can well imagine, was difficult on all of us.

"But we have moved forward. It is now removed from our thoughts." It wasn't, however, as the first half of the Kansas game showed.

Since then, the Cornhuskers have played like national title contenders, with the notable exception of the let-down late in the Colorado game that could have cost them dearly.

That Solich would be so successful in his second season seemed unlikely early on.

Try as he might, he couldn't avoid a quarterback controversy involving Newcombe and Crouch, who was rumored to have considered quitting the team when Newcombe was named the starter.

Then after DeAngelo Evans quit the team, Solich's control was questioned.

And those questions continued when Buckhalter went absent without leave.

The player problems were eventually resolved, but an early-season propensity toward fumbling intensified from the Iowa State game on, reaching its zenith against Kansas State and Colorado.

Nebraska lost 8 of 18 fumbles in those two games. The more the problem was discussed, the worse it became. "I don't think you can do much more than we've done," said an exasperated Solich.

The Cornhuskers set a school single-season record and led the nation in fumbles, a dubious distinction to be sure but one that underscores just how resilient they have been.

Even with the fumbles, they finished the regular season with a positive turnover ratio, thanks to a veteran-laden defense that has been a constant from the beginning.

The offense was slower in developing, because of the uncertainty at I-back and the maturing of a line that lost starting tackle Jason Schwab to a knee injury during two-a-day practices.

The offensive line, with sophomore Dave Volk stepping in for Schwab, made great strides this season, according to Solich. "Many of them are the same offensive linemen (as a year ago), but they were young and inexperienced," he said before the Big 12 championship-game rematch with Texas.

"They were guys who were developing in our program. And right now, they're full of confidence. They believe in one another as a unit. They believe in themselves as individuals.

"So we are a much better off-



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sive line, and I think it takes playing together in order to have that happen. It doesn't just automatically happen when you step on the field."

Crouch also has benefited from the confidence that comes from experience.

The emergence of the sophomore from Omaha, who led the nation's major college quarterbacks in rushing yards and touchdowns, has been a key element to Nebraska's success.

As he has matured, so has the offense. "I think from about mid-season on, we started to come through a stretch where we started to develop a little bit more as a running team," Solich said.

Despite problems early, Nebraska finished fourth in the nation in rushing.

The Cornhuskers rushed for 139 yards in the second half of the Kansas game, not a typical effort based on the standard established by Tom Osborne's teams. But when you consider they rushed for only 34 yards in the first half, the 139 yards represented a dramatic improvement.

That showed, as much as anything, that Nebraska was back on track.

Because as the running game goes, so go the Cornhuskers. ■

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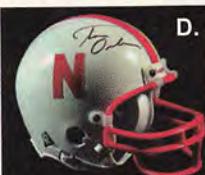
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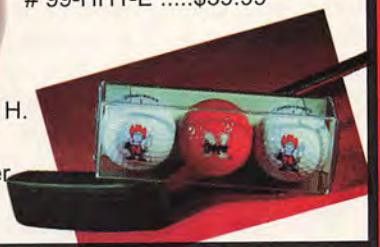
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SCOUTING REPORT

Vols Return to Title Site

Tennessee completed dream season in last year's Fiesta Bowl

The Fiesta Bowl and Tempe, Ariz., should bring back good memories for the University of Tennessee.

The Volunteers completed a dream season last year with a 23-16 victory over Florida State in the Fiesta Bowl. That win earned the Vols their first national title in the first game arranged under the Bowl Championship Series.

This year, Tennessee stumbled early, losing 23-21 at Florida Sept.

Tentative 2 Deeps

NEBRASKA OFFENSE

SE 3	Matt Davison**	6-1	180	Jr.
9	Wilson Thomas	6-5	210	Fr.
LT 69	Adam Jilich***	6-5	320	Sr.
66	Jon Rutherford*	6-3	295	So.
LG 63	James Sherman***	6-4	295	Sr.
77	Toniu Fonoti	6-4	330	Fr.
C 54	Dominic Raiola*	6-2	295	So.
51	Matt Baldwin**	6-2	285	Sr.
RG 55	Russ Hochstein**	6-3	280	Jr.
64	Steve Alstadt	6-5	275	So.
RT 58	Dave Volk*	6-5	295	So.
75	Kyle Kollmorgen*	6-5	290	So.
TE 85	T.J. DeBates***	6-3	250	Sr.
and 87	Tracey Wistrom	6-5	220	So.
QB 7	Eric Crouch*	6-1	195	So.
14	Jeff Perino*	6-2	210	Sr.
15	Willie Miller**	6-1	240	Jr.
35	Tyrone Uhlir	6-0	230	Fr.
IB 38	Dan Alexander**	6-0	245	Jr.
36	Correll Buckhalter**	6-0	225	Jr.
WB 82	Sean Applegate**	5-9	185	Sr.
and 12	Bobby Newcombe**	6-0	195	Jr.
PK 26	Josh Brown	6-2	185	Fr.

NEBRASKA DEFENSE

LR 81	Aaron Wills***	6-2	250	Sr.
57	Chris Kelsay	6-5	255	Fr.
NT 96	Steve Warren***	6-2	315	Sr.
70	Jason Lohr*	6-2	275	So.
DT 91	Loran Kaiser**	6-4	290	Jr.
71	Matt McGinn	6-1	280	So.
83	Kyle Vanden Bosch*	6-4	270	Jr.
98	Demoine Adams	6-2	225	Fr.
SLB 37	Tony Ortiz***	6-1	220	Sr.
or- 46	Brian Shaw***	6-1	220	Sr.
MLB 13	Carlos Polk**	6-2	250	Jr.
48	Jamie Burrow*	6-1	235	So.
WLB 27	Eric Johnson***	6-1	205	Sr.
50	Julius Jackson***	6-1	240	Sr.
LCB 3	Keyuo Craver*	5-10	190	So.
5	DeJuan Groce	5-10	190	Fr.
FS 14	Dion Booker*	6-1	205	So.
19	Clint Finley**	6-0	205	Jr.
ROV 21	Mike Brown***	5-10	205	Sr.
25	Joe Walker**	5-10	195	Jr.
RCB 22	Ralph Brown***	5-10	180	Sr.
18	Jeff Hemje	6-0	185	So.
P 17	Dan Hadenfeldt*	5-11	195	Sr.

TENNESSEE

Record 9-2

S 4	Wyoming	W, 42-17
S 18	@ Florida	L, 23-21
S 25	Memphis	W, 17-16
O 2	Auburn	W, 24-0
O 9	Georgia	W, 37-20
O 23	@ Alabama	W, 21-7
O 30	S. Carolina	W, 30-7
N 6	Notre Dame	W, 38-14
N 13	@ Arkansas	L, 28-24
N 20	@ Kentucky	W, 56-21
N 27	Vanderbilt	W, 38-10

NEBRASKA

Record 11-1

S 4	@ Iowa	W, 42-7
S 11	California	W, 45-0
S 18	So. Mississippi	W, 20-13
S 25	@ Missouri	W, 40-10
O 2	Oklahoma St.	W, 38-14
O 9	Iowa St.	W, 49-14
O 23	@ Texas	L, 24-20
O 30	@ Kansas	W, 24-17
N 6	Texas A&M	W, 37-0
N 13	Kansas St.	W, 41-15
N 26	@ Colorado	W, 33-30
D 4	Texas	W, 22-6

18. The Vols struggled past Memphis 17-16 the following week to start a six-game winning streak that ended with a 28-24 setback Nov. 13 at Arkansas.

Tennessee came back to defeat Kentucky and Vanderbilt to complete a 9-2 season and finds itself back in the Fiesta Bowl against Nebraska, which overwhelmed the Vols 42-17 in the Orange Bowl two years ago to earn a share of the national championship.

Tennessee Coach Phillip Fulmer still has vivid memories of that game.

"We took some lessons from the Orange Bowl, and that helped propel us to the season we had last year," Fulmer said.

While Nebraska is playing in its sixth Fiesta Bowl, the Vols appeared just once before their championship season, losing to Penn State 42-17 to end the 1991 season.

VOLS EARN HONORS

Two Tennessee players — offensive guard Cosey Coleman and linebacker Raynoch Thompson — were selected to the Associated Press All-America first team. Free safety Deon Grant made the second team, and defensive tackle Darwin Walker was a third-team selection.

Coleman, a 6-foot-5, 315-pound junior, was the leader on an offen-

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sive line that paved the way for the Vols to average more than 400 yards of total offense per game in 1999.

Grant, a junior from Augusta, Ga., was named the AP Southeastern Conference Defensive Player of the Year. He led the nation with 9 interceptions during the 1999 campaign and ranked second on the team in tackles with 69, including 50 solo stops. A finalist for this season's Jim Thorpe Award as the nation's top defensive back, Grant ranks fifth on Tennessee's all-time

Tentative 2 Deeps

TENNESSEE DEFENSE

LE 93	Shaun Ellis**	6-4	275	Sr.
56	Bernard Jackson*	6-4	255	So.
LT 98	John Henderson	6-7	280	So.
92	Albert Haynesworth	6-6	300	Fr.
RT 58	Darwin Walker**	6-3	290	Sr.
94	Ed Butler	6-3	255	So.
RE 90	Will Overstreet*	6-4	250	So.
99	DeAngelo Lloyd**	6-5	255	Jr.
LLB 42	E. Westmoreland*	6-0	215	Jr.
22	Anthony Sessions	6-1	210	Jr.
MLB 28	Dom. Stevenson*	6-0	215	Jr.
50	Keyon Whiteside	6-2	230	Fr.
RLB 46	Ray. Thompson**	6-3	217	Sr.
59	Judd Granzow*	6-4	235	Jr.
LCB 30	Andre Lott*	5-11	185	Jr.
3	Willie Miles*	6-0	170	So.
RCB 23	Dwayne Goodrich	6-0	185	Sr.
12	Teddy Gaines	6-0	165	So.
SS 2	Fred White***	5-11	200	Sr.
33	Derrick Edmonds***	5-10	185	Sr.
FS 7	Deon Grant**	6-3	205	Jr.
29	Mikki Allen***	6-0	175	Sr.
P 43	David Leaverton*	6-4	210	Jr.

TENNESSEE OFFENSE

TE 96	John Finlayson	6-4	280	So.
84	Neil Johnson*	6-4	250	Jr.
LT 67	Chad Clifton***	6-6	320	Sr.
71	Reggie Coleman	6-5	310	So.
LG 70	Fred Weary*	6-4	290	So.
53	Toby Champion*	6-4	305	Jr.
C 68	Spencer Riley***	6-3	305	Sr.
72	Greg Barnum	6-1	295	Fr.
RG 52	Cosey Coleman**	6-5	315	Jr.
74	Bernard Gooden	6-3	315	Jr.
RT 77	Josh Tucker***	6-4	305	Sr.
73	Will O'Feneusle	6-8	310	Fr.
WR 87	David Martin**	6-4	210	Jr.
11	Bobby Graham	6-0	185	So.
WR 14	Cedrick Wilson**	5-10	175	Jr.
80	Eric Parker*	6-0	163	So.
QB 78	Tee Martin***	6-3	215	Sr.
8	Joey Mathews	6-3	210	Fr.
TB 31	Janell Lewis**	6-0	225	Jr.
25	Travis Henry**	5-11	220	Jr.
FB 21	Philip Crosby**	6-1	243	Sr.
45	W. Bartholomew*	6-0	230	So.
PK 19	Alex Walls	6-1	175	Fr.

PICKS

Brian Hill
Editor

Nebraska 27, Tennessee 14

The four weeks off will help heal the many bumps and bruises the Huskers picked up during their challenging stretch run. NU's defense should be able to hold down the Vols, but the offense had better not go into a shell in the second half or repeatedly drop that one thing.

Mike Babcock
Contributing Editor

Nebraska 21, Tennessee 20

This figures to be the most competitive of the bowl games. Tennessee shouldn't be as surprised by the Cornhuskers' physicalness as it was in the 1998 Orange Bowl game. Even so, Nebraska has a slight edge because of its defense, assuming everyone is healthy by Jan. 2, 2000. The season has taken a toll on the Cornhuskers. But they should have enough left to win.

Bob Schaller
Contributing Writer
Nebraska 24, Tennessee 22

I'll take Charlie McBride on my side in a bowl game any day, any year, any place. The man has simply emerged as the top assistant coach in the country, and — like the other Husker coaches — spends endless hours at his craft. The offense will have just enough for strong first half and Tennessee will rally late, but it won't be enough.

Terry Douglass
Grand Island Independent
Sports Editor
Nebraska 21, Tennessee 17

Tennessee quarterback Tee Martin isn't going to enjoy looking at game film from the Big 12 Championship game as Nebraska's defenders got to know Longhorn quarterback Major Applewhite up close and personal. Expect more of the same in the Fiesta Bowl as the Cornhuskers will be looking to start next year's run at the national championship with a win over the Volunteers.

interceptions list with 15.

Grant led a parade of Vols named to this year's AP All-SEC squad. On

offense, quarterback Tee Martin and offensive guard Cosey Coleman, a 1998 first-team selection, were named to the first team, while wide receiver Cedrick Wilson and running back Jamal Lewis were named second-team selections. Center Spencer Riley and receiver Leonard Scott, who was named as a return specialist, were chosen as honorable mention.

The Vols placed four players on the AP's first-team All-SEC defensive squad. Thompson and Walker are repeat performers from last season. Defensive end Shaun Ellis and Grant were also first-team picks. Ellis led the Vols with 8.5 quarterback sacks (-82 yards) and 11 tackles for loss (-25 yards), while Walker was sixth on the team in tackles, including 8 tackles for loss (-32) and 7 sacks (-44) this season.

PEYTON'S PLACE

Quarterback Tee Martin didn't quite make fans forget about Peyton Manning, but he did an adequate job of replacing the Heisman Trophy winner.

Martin led the Vols to a 22-2 mark as Tennessee's starting quarterback over the past two seasons, including a 13-0 national championship season in 1998. He was undefeated as the Vols' starter in two seasons at Neyland Stadium, compiling a 13-0 record.

Martin passed for 2,317 yards this season, completing 165-of-305 passes, with 12 touchdowns. He ranked third in the SEC in total offense, amassing 239.5 yards per game.

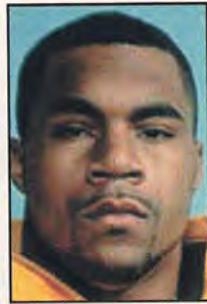
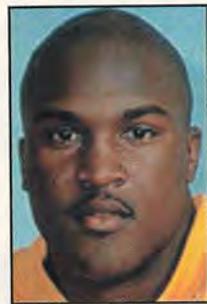
HENRY STEPS UP

Junior running back Travis Henry stepped in for ailing starter Jamal Lewis for the second straight season.

Last year, Henry stepped in when Lewis suffered a knee injury and helped lead the Vols to the national championship.

This year, with Lewis slowed by nagging injuries, Henry rushed for 790 yards and eight touchdowns. That compared to 816 and seven scores for Lewis. Henry, who had touchdown runs of 40, 28, 13, 61, 40 and 63 yards in the final three games, averaged 6.3 yards per carry, compared to 4.5 for Lewis.

Henry experienced a frightening moment in the Vanderbilt game



Quarterback Tee Martin (left) has led Tennessee to a 22-2 mark the past two seasons. Jamal Lewis (right) led the Vols in rushing with 816 yards.



Tennessee Coach Phillip Fulmer (left) has the best winning percentage among active Division I-A coaches. He has led the Volunteers to 54 victories in the past five seasons.

Nov. 27. A head-first fall while trying to leap into the end zone left Henry on the ground with trainers and players huddled around him.

It took nearly 15 minutes to place Henry on a cart and take him to nearby Tennessee Medical Center, where he was hospitalized for a day as a precaution. Tests showed that Henry had sustained a slight concussion and a bruised spinal cord.

FULMER GAINS HONOR

Fulmer has been named the recipient of the second annual State Farm Eddie Robinson Coach of Distinction Award. He was cited for his qualities as a role model and mentor to students and players, an active member of the community, and an accomplished football coach, the qualities that embody the coaching legacy of former Grambling head coach Eddie Robinson.

The award was announced in the Dec. 6 issue of Sports Illustrated. The previous winner was Penn State's Joe Paterno.

Fulmer led the Volunteers to the 1998 national championship and 13-0 season and has the best winning percentage among active Division I-A coaches. His 54 victories from 1995-99 are the most in school history over a five-year span, and, during the same time period, 79 Vols earned academic All-SEC recognition. He is 76-13 overall. ■

No Pain NU Gain

**Healthy Warren
puts the hurt on
opposing offenses**

By Mike Babcock

The pain was constant, and often so intense that Steve Warren was immobilized.

"It was bad, even when I would wake up in the morning," Nebraska's senior nose tackle said recently. "On days we had off, I wouldn't be able to do anything the whole day."

Warren is good-natured. Anyone familiar with the football team would tell you that.

But "I wasn't a too-fun guy to be around last year," he said.

The primary problem was back spasms, which bothered him all season. But a knee injury, suffered in the Iowa State game, also affected his disposition, as did the death of his grandmother.

Warren found himself withdrawing, spending time alone or with a few close friends. "Things got worse," he said. "It was to the point where I didn't want to be around people."

"I didn't talk to many of the coaches. I just hung around with a select group of guys. Mostly, I stayed home and didn't do much of anything. Everybody inside the program knew my back was bothering me, but I don't think a lot of people outside, besides my family, knew I was in so much pain."

"I was just beat-up last year, physically."

He began the season as the starter, stepping in for Jason Wiltz, who also was slowed by injury.

After starting the first six games, Warren missed two because of the back problems. But he returned to finish out the season, backing up Wiltz.

"Most of the time the pain wasn't

anything where I felt I couldn't be effective," said Warren. "It was something I had to go out every day and play with."

"We didn't have much depth in the defensive line, and sometimes I would spasm up so bad before the game that I would go in early and get massages and heat packs."

He also wore a special brace against the constant pain.

"I thought there was nothing I could do," he said.

He underwent knee surgery after the Holiday Bowl game, but the back spasms continued, creating serious doubt in his mind about his being able to play this season.

"I just felt it was never not going to bother me," he said.

His plan, following spring practice, was to see how he felt during two-a-day practices in the fall. If the back pain persisted, he thought, he would ask if he could be redshirted.

He was among five Cornhusker true freshmen who didn't redshirt in 1996. The others were Ralph Brown, Mike Brown, DeAngelo Evans and J.R. Edwards. (Eric Johnson also played that season, his first at Nebraska. But he was initially considered a sophomore in eligibility.)

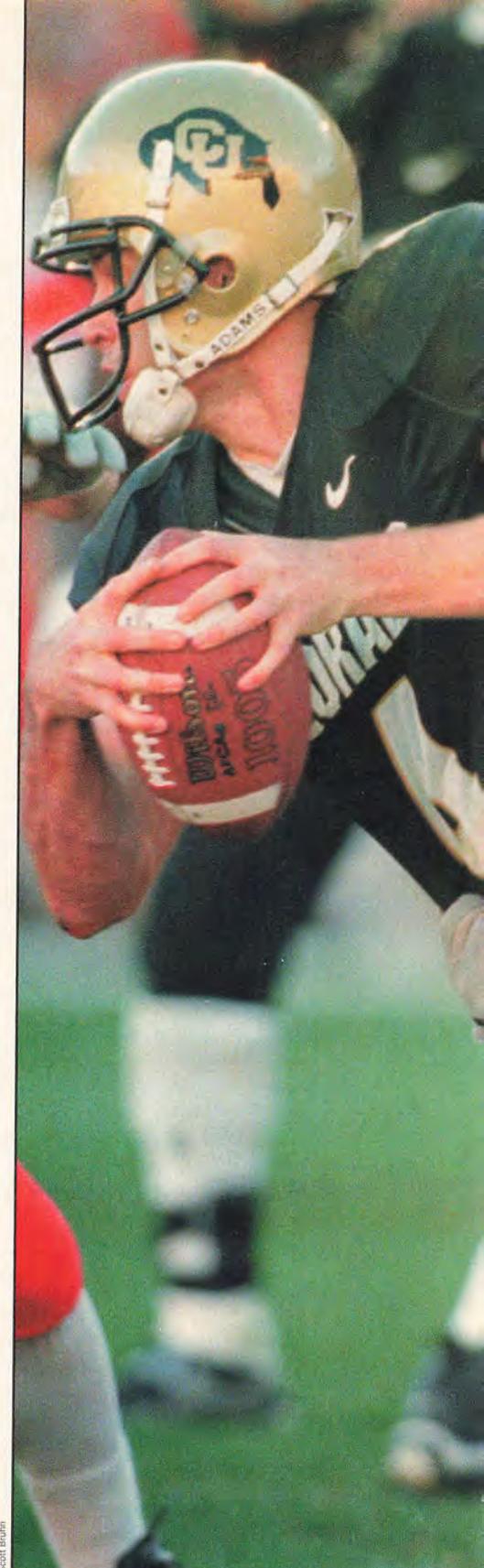
Warren, who came from Kickapoo High School in Springfield, Mo., had the size and strength to play immediately. And it was apparent early on that he wouldn't be redshirted.

"I never really talked to any of the coaches about redshirting my freshman year," he said.

"The way it was explained to me was, I probably wasn't going to red-shirt, that they didn't really feel I needed to. A lot of guys come in and are undersized, under speed and don't have the strength."

"But they felt I had all the tools I needed to do some things my freshman year."

He saw limited action in eight games as a true freshman, then worked his way into the mix as a



Scott Bruhn

sophomore. He started two games and came up big against Texas A&M in the conference championship game, replacing Jason Peter, who had to leave the game because of back spasms.

In any case, Warren still had a red-shirt season, which he could have



Senior Steve Warren leads the Nebraska defense with seven sacks, including two against Colorado.

taken this year. "Fortunately, that didn't have to happen, and I didn't have to bring it up to the coaches," he said.

The back spasms didn't bother him during fall camp, though he's not

exactly certain why.

"I really don't know," he said. "I really can't say if it was one thing or another. But I guess it was just the combination of working out, losing weight and having a lot of people

praying for me.

"I think it was a combination of those three things."

He got by with a little help from his friends. "The biggest thing was, a lot of people supported me and prayed for me," he said. "I think that would probably be the biggest factor to me."

Whatever the reasons, Warren has played without last season's back pain. And he's played as well as any Cornhusker nose tackle, according to defensive coordinator Charlie McBride.

Warren led the team in tackles for loss, with 15 for 87 yards in losses. He led the team in sacks, with seven for 65 yards in losses. And he led the interior linemen in quarterback hurries, with 10.

He also increased his career position record for pass breakups to 10.

For his efforts, he was named first-team All-Big 12 by the conference coaches, the Associated Press and the Football News. That recognition "is big to me," he said.

"I felt last year it was something I probably should have made. I'm not saying I played well enough. But before the season, mentally, I felt I was good enough that I could get a couple of awards.

"But my (junior) season didn't go as expected. So this season, being able to go out and do the things I've done and then to be able to gain that honor, has been real big to me."

Warren also might have put himself in position to play at the next level. Gil Brandt, a scouting consultant for the NFL, has compared him to Warren Sapp of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Warren, like Sapp, stands 6-foot-2, which isn't tall for an NFL defensive lineman. But he has good speed for his size — 315 pounds. He has been timed at 5.28 seconds in the 40-yard dash. "Everybody sees Steve Warren as a possible Warren Sapp," Brandt recently told the Omaha World-Herald.

Warren has felt "10 times" better this season than he did last season. "It's on opposite ends of the scale how I feel," he said. "I'm not anywhere ready for this season to be over."

"Last year, toward the middle of the season, I was ready for it to be over."

In fact, this season "has gone a little too fast for me," he said. "I didn't think at the beginning of the season it would go quite this fast. But it's been like a downhill roller coaster."

"It has picked up speed every weekend."

That's far from being immobile. ■





Texas quarterback Major Applewhite was under constant pressure from the Nebraska defense, including Julius Jackson (left) and Mike Brown (above). Each was credited with one sack, and the Huskers finished with seven for 44 yards in losses.

GAME RECAP

Hex No

**No luck needed as
Huskers blitz Texas to
win Big 12 title, end
losing streak in series**

**Story by Mike Babcock
Photos by Scott Bruhn**

Pam Solich held two Beanie Babies, long after Nebraska had avenged its only loss and won the Big 12 championship by defeating Texas 22-6 at San Antonio, Texas.

She waited for her husband to answer questions from a handful of reporters who had followed him from the interview room on the lower level of the cavernous Alamodome.

Her nervous energy was just beginning to dissipate.

The Beanie Babies had served their purpose again. Without them, she said, her fingernails would have been chewed to the quick. She turned them in her hands, as she had done throughout the game, a yellow and black fish, which she had gotten in 1994 when Nebraska won the first of its three national championships in the 1990s, and a ladybug, which she had gotten a year later.

The ladybug's back was red with black spots. It was the first red Beanie she had found.

She pulled a third Beanie, a green and brown turtle, from her purse. Turtles are lucky, she said.

The Cornhuskers didn't have to depend on luck, however, as they had at the end of regulation in their overtime victory at Colorado the week before, to win the rematch with Texas.

They beat the Longhorns straight up, with a blitzing defense that made life miserable for quarterback Major Applewhite and a power offense, intended to reduce the likelihood of fumbles.

"We thought it would be important to try to establish the running game without getting too fancy with the football," Frank Solich said. "What we did not want to do was put our defense in a bind very early in the game. So the power plays we ran, we were effective with them at the start."

Even though Nebraska didn't score on the game's first offensive series, it established what the Cornhuskers intended to do. They moved from their own 11-yard line to the Texas 43-yard line on eight plays, all of them runs, before Dan Hadenfeldt punted for the first of nine times.

The drive "gave a good momentum boost to this team," said quarterback Eric Crouch.

Nebraska's defense also made a statement early, dropping running back Hodges Mitchell for a 2-yard loss on the Longhorns' first play from scrimmage and forcing them to go three downs and punt.

Mitchell, a first-team all-conference selection, had to rush for 100 yards and the offensive line had to protect Applewhite in order for Texas to be successful on offense, Coach Mack Brown said.

Neither would happen. Mitchell, who had rushed for more than 1,300 yards, managed only 14 yards on seven carries, all but one in the first half, before giving way to Victor Ike and Kenny Hayter. And Applewhite was harassed mercilessly by the Nebraska Blackshirts.

The sophomore from Baton Rouge, La., was sacked seven times and threw three interceptions. The first time the teams played, he was sacked only once and didn't throw an interception.

"We couldn't protect well enough to pass it," Mack Brown said.

After the first game, in which he



Junior I-back Correll Buckhalter, who carried the load after starter Dan Alexander was injured, led the Huskers with 136 yards, including a 55-yard burst.

completed 17-of-30 passes for 213 yards and two touchdowns, Applewhite was quoted by Tim Layden in Sports Illustrated as saying Nebraska's defense wasn't all that complicated and that playing the Cornhuskers wasn't "going to be calculus."

Applewhite might not have meant any disrespect, and he couldn't have known at the time that the teams would play again, anyway. Nevertheless, the remarks came back to haunt him.

The Blackshirts took offense. "That kind of hurt a little bit," said rover Mike Brown.

"We knew our defense isn't that simple. We're pretty complicated. We have a lot of things we throw at people, and I think today we showed that, and confused them a little bit."

"He (Applewhite) forced some throws, and we got some interceptions."

Nebraska blitzed on nearly every down, according to cornerback Ralph Brown, and Applewhite

4TH & INCHES

Notes And Quotes From The Texas Game

LONGHORNS CAN'T MOVE AGAINST HUSKERS

Texas finished with a rushing net of 6 yards, the lowest against the Cornhuskers this season. The previous low was 25 rushing yards by Southern Mississippi and Missouri.

Texas went into the game ranked first in the Big 12 and 12th nationally in total offense, averaging 429.8 yards per game. The Longhorns were averaging 36.5 points per game. "We've been able to move the ball against everybody," Coach Mack Brown said. "That's a credit to Nebraska."

"Nebraska kept us out of sync (offensively). I thought we played as hard as we could play. If we hadn't played hard, Nebraska would have beaten us badly."

CROUCH LEADS 1999 HUSKERS IN RUSHING, SCORING

Cornhusker quarterback Eric Crouch rushed for a touchdown in a ninth consecutive game. The sophomore from Omaha had at least one rushing touchdown in every game but one this season. He did not have a rushing touchdown in his first start against Southern Mississippi.

Crouch rushed for 72 yards on 23 carries to finish as Nebraska's leading rusher for the season, with 889 yards on 171 carries. The last quarterback to lead the Cornhuskers in rushing was Rex Fischer, who ran for 599 yards on 131 carries in 1955. Crouch also led the team in touchdowns with 16.

He led NCAA Division I-A quarterbacks in rushing yardage and touchdowns, as well.

Crouch's pass interception in the second quarter (on which Texas failed to capitalize) was his first since the Missouri game. He had gone 32 quarters and 123 attempts without an interception.

Strongside linebacker Tony Ortiz intercepted Major Applewhite's pass on the first play after Crouch's interception. Ralph Brown and Dion Booker also intercepted Applewhite passes.

HUSKERS LEFT WITH LONG INJURY LIST

The game took a physical toll on the Cornhuskers.

"Right now, we are a banged up football team," Solich said.

Starting I-back Dan Alexander suffered a severe laceration on his right palm in the first quarter and didn't play the rest of the game. I-back Correll Buckhalter played with a toe injury, suffered in the second quarter. Fullback Willie Miller and wide receiver Wilson Thomas suffered an AC joint injuries.

Offensive tackle Adam Julch suffered a deep thigh bruise. Middle linebacker Carlos Polk suffered a shin bruise. And cornerback Ralph Brown played with sprained thumbs and a groin injury.

In addition, tight end Tracey Wistrom didn't suit up because of a knee injury.

Quarterback Eric Crouch "was feeling good going into the game," said Solich.

However, "both elbows had been sore leading up to the game."

Crouch also had been bothered by a sore wrist, which "had really come along well from the beginning of the week on to where he was saying it was no problem," Solich said.

WITH WISTRUM MISSING, BOWLING GETS A SHOT

With Wistrom sidelined, redshirted freshman Aaron Golliday started at tight end along with senior T.J. DeBates. Jon Bowling, another redshirted freshman, caught two passes for 30 yards. The receptions were the first of Bowling's career.

NOTeworthy

— Junior split end Matt Davison caught two passes for 19 yards and moved up to fourth on Nebraska's career-receiving list, tying Tim Smith (1977-79) with 72 catches for 1,067 yards. Davison's yardage ranks eighth all-time at Nebraska. He has caught at least one pass in 26 of the last 28 games.

The Cornhuskers were conservative in the second half, throwing only one incomplete pass.

— Cornerback Ralph Brown, who started a school-record 51st consecutive game, was credited with five pass breakups to give him a school-record 16 for the season. He set the previous record last season, with 14, and is the first player to lead Nebraska in that category in four consecutive seasons.

— Senior punter Dan Hadenfeldt averaged 39.3 yards on nine punts to break the school record for season punting average, 44.98. The previous record was 44.94, set by Bill Lafleur last season. Lafleur broke Jesse Kosch's record of 44.7, set in 1996. All three punters came to Nebraska as walk-ons.

Hadenfeldt's 44.98 average also broke Kosch's school career record of 41.92. Hadenfeldt punted only one season. Kosch punted from 1994 to 1997.

— Texas quarterback Major Applewhite had passed for 200 or more yards in 19 consecutive games in which he had started. He was limited to 172 yards passing, on 15-of-42 completions. ■

"didn't know who was coming at him or which linebacker was blitzing," he said.

"It gave us a good chance to get in his face and switch a lot of things up. Our main purpose was to not let Applewhite have a lot of time to pick out his wide receivers all the way down the field."

Applewhite finished with 15-of-42 pass completions for 164 yards.

The first time the teams played, he passed for 166 yards and two touchdowns in the second half. He completed 8-of-9 in the final two quarters, on a windy afternoon in Austin. The concern was that he would pose an even greater problem in the controlled environment of the Alamodome.

Nebraska changed its blitzes, focusing on the middle, as Kansas State had done in defeating Texas 35-17. "They changed their pass rush," Mack Brown said in answer to a question.

"They were faster, the same guys, but they came faster."

The artificial surface at the Alamodome might have had something to do with that.

Plus, "I think we made 'em mad the last time," said Mack Brown.

Texas had a net of minus-24 yards rushing at halftime, underscoring the pressure on the beleaguered Applewhite. "We were no-dimensional in the first half," Mack Brown said. "At halftime, I was mad and I didn't know who to be mad at. We were trying, but they just whipped us."

"When yours don't stop theirs, you're going to get beat."

The Longhorn defense couldn't stop Nebraska early. The Cornhuskers gained 111 yards and scored 10 points, all they really needed, during the first quarter to take control of the game.

Josh Brown kicked the first of his two field goals on the second possession, and Crouch ran 31 yards for the first of his two touchdowns on a fourth-and-1 on the third possession.

Crouch faked to the fullback to freeze tackles Casey Hampton and Shaun Rogers then followed the I-back. "It was a play that could break off tackle or could go wider," Solich said.

Once Crouch got past the line of scrimmage, it was a footrace to the end zone.

Nebraska added a Josh Brown field goal and a safety, when the center snap in shotgun formation sailed over Applewhite's head, in the sec-

BY THE NUMBERS

Nebraska vs. Texas • Big 12 Championship
Dec. 4, 1999 • Alamodome • San Antonio, Texas

Score By Quarters

Texas	0	0	0	6	—	6
Nebraska	10	5	7	0	—	22

Team Stats

	UT	NU
First Downs	15	14
Rushing	5	12
Passing	9	2
Penalty	1	0
Rushing Attempts	30	58
Yards Gained Rushing	86	275
Yards Lost Rushing	80	41
Net Yards Rushing	6	234
Net Yards Passing	172	55
Passes Attempted	42	15
Passes Completed	15	6
Had Intercepted	3	1
Total Plays	72	73
Total Net Yards	178	289
Avg. Gain Per Play	2.5	4.0
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	2-2
Penalties-Yards	4-22	4-20
Punts-Yards	10-391	9-354
Avg. Per Punt	39.1	39.3
Punt Returns-Yards	6-44	6-74
Interceptions-Yards	1-0	3-59
Fumble Returns-Yards	1-20	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	2-38	3-60
Possession Time	22:09	37:51

Scoring

NU — Josh Brown kick 42-yard field goal
NU — Eric Crouch 31-yard run (Brown kick)
NU — Brown 21-yard field goal
NU — Team safety
NU — Crouch 4-yard run (Brown kick)
UT — Ahmad Brooks 20-yard fumble recovery (pass failed)

Att. — 65,035



Individual Leaders

TEXAS

RUSHING					
Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Ike, V.	3	21	7.0	20	0
Hayter, K.	8	19	2.4	9	0
Mitchell, H.	7	17	2.4	8	0
Brown, R.	1	2	2.0	2	0
Team	1	-15	-15.0	0	0
Applewhite, M.	9	-35	-3.9	10	0

PASSING					
Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD	
Applewhite, M.	15-42-3	35.7	172	0	

RECEIVING					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Caval, K.	5	90	18.0	30	0
Nunez, R.	3	31	10.3	15	0
Ike, V.	2	19	9.5	16	0
Flowers, M.	2	16	8.0	12	0
Brown, R.	2	9	4.5	7	0
Healy, B.	1	-1	-0.5	0	0

PUNTING					
Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG	
Stockton, K.	2	86	43.0	44	
Long, R.	8	305	38.1	52	

PUNT RETURNS					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Garcia, C.	4	32	8.0	11	0
Mitchell, H.	2	12	6.0	10	0

KICKOFF RETURNS					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Mitchell, H.	1	20	20.0	20	0
Jones, J.	1	18	18.0	18	0

DEFENSE					
UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Lewis, D.	7	5	1-1	0	0
Jackson, L.	5	4	9-1	0	0
Flowers, M.	5	4	9	0	0
Humphrey, A.	3	5	8-15	0	1-10
Woodard, C.	5	1	6-2-3	0	0
Brooks, A.	5	1	6	0	0
Rogers, S.	3	3	6-3-12	0	1-10
Hampton, C.	3	2	5	3-5	0
Jones, T.	0	3	3	0	0
Hill, E.	2	0	2	0	0
Dillon, T.	2	0	2	0	0
Robertson, C.	2	0	2	0	0
Barbers, R.	1	0	1	1-2	0
Hicks, A.	1	0	1	0	0
Brown, R.	1	0	1	0	0
Brown, G.	0	0	0	1-0	0

NEBRASKA

RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Buckhalter, C.	20	136	6.8	55	0
Crouch, E.	23	72	3.1	31	2
Miller, W.	8	17	2.1	9	0
Alexander, D.	4	13	3.3	17	0
Diedrick, D.	3	-4	-1.3	0	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	6-14-1	42.9	55	0
Newcombe, B.	0-1-0	0.0	0	0

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Bowling, J.	2	30	15.0	22	0
Davison, M.	2	19	9.5	11	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	9	354	39.3	52

PUNT RETURNS

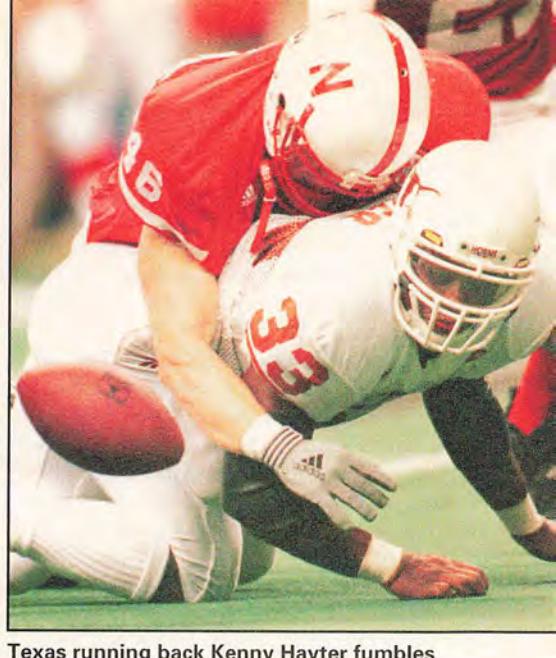
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Newcombe, B.	2	36	18.0	26	0
Craver, K.	1	12	12.0	12	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Walker, J.	2	42	21.0	28	0
Newcombe, B.	1	18	18.0	18	0

DEFENSE

UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Brown, M.	3	3	6-1-10	0	1-10
Brown, R.	5	0	5	0-16	0
Kaiser, L.	2	3	5-3-15	0	2-13
Ortiz, T.	3	1	4-1-2	1-6	0
Jackson, J.	3	0	3-1-2	0	1-2
Booker, D.	2	1	3	0	1-37
Warren, S.	1	2	3	2-5	0
Polk, C.	1	2	3	0	0
Vanden Bosch, K.	2	0	2-1-8	0	1-8
Walker, J.	1	2	2-1-1	0	0
Burrow, J.	1	1	2-1-4	0	0
Lohr, J.	1	1	2-1-2	0	1-2
Shaw, B.	0	2	2	0	0
Kelsay, C.	0	2	2	0	0
Garrison, J.	0	2	2	0	0
Wills, A.	1	0	1	1-9	0
Johnson, E.	1	0	1	0	0
Finley, C.	1	0	1	0	0
Ryan, E.	1	0	1	0	0



Texas running back Kenny Hayter fumbles as he is hit by NU's Brian Shaw in the fourth quarter.

'99 SEASON STATS

RUSHING

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Crouch, E.	12	180	889	74.1	16
Alexander, D.	12	134	865	72.1	8
Buckhalter, C.	11	111	662	60.2	6
Diedrick, D.	12	57	303	25.2	2
Miller, W.	10	55	195	19.5	2
Newcombe, B.	12	37	87	7.2	3
Evans, D.	2	19	74	37.0	0
Perino, J.	7	15	65	9.6	0
Uhler, T.	12	11	30	2.5	0
Kingston, B.	11	6	19	1.7	0

PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	12	83-160-4	51.9	1,269	7
Newcombe, B.	12	11-19-1	57.9	246	2
Perino, J.	7	0-1-0	0.0	0	0
Chrisman, J.	1	0-4-0	0.0	0	0

DEFENSIVE LEADERS

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Brown, M.	12	56	40	96	8-46	0	2-30
Polk, C.	12	32	51	83	12-56	0	8-47
Wills, A.	12	19	238	12.5	19.8	3	2-14
Craver, K.	11	16	429	26.8	39.0	2	3-13
Applegate, S.	12	5	103	20.6	8.6	1	0
Alexander, D.	12	4	56	15.2	4.7	0	0
Golliday, A.	12	3	53	17.7	4.4	0	0
Miller, W.	10	3	26	8.7	2.6	0	0
Buckhalter, C.	11	3	21	7.0	1.9	0	0
Crouch, E.	12	2	46	23.0	3.8	1	0
Bowling, J.	7	2	30	15.0	4.3	0	0
Gibson, J.	10	2	19	9.5	1.9	0	0
London, F.	10	2	11				



Nebraska quarterback Eric Crouch eludes a pair of Texas defenders. He rushed for 72 yards and two touchdowns, the first coming on a fourth-and-1 from the UT 31 late in the first quarter.

ond quarter to increase the lead to 15-0 at halftime.

Had Solich not turned conservative in the second half, the score might have mounted.

"We didn't want to get to where we did too many different things (offensively)," he said. "What we didn't want to do was run a lot of different things that would make us vulnerable to the turnover because the defense was playing so well and we were able to get enough yards and first downs on some inside running game and then some outside running game, without pitching the ball."

"Having the lead, we did back off a little bit. But I think it made sense. The last thing we wanted to do was flood the second half with turnovers and put them back in the game right away."

The Cornhuskers lost two fumbles in the fourth quarter. The first, by I-back Dahrran Diedrick, was picked up by cornerback Ahmad Brooks and returned 20 yards for a touchdown.

The second, by Crouch on the center snap, came at the Texas 6-yard line.

The fumbles didn't diminish Nebraska's effort, however. The

Cornhuskers not only won their second Big 12 title in three years but they also snapped a three-game losing streak to Texas.

"I know I didn't want to leave here without beating Texas," said Mike Brown, who was a true freshman when Nebraska lost to the Longhorns in the first Big 12 playoff in 1996.

"I finally got them . . . and I can die now."

His comment elicited laughter.

"Don't do that on us," Solich said.

Halfway around the building, Pam Solich held the Beanies and waited for her husband. ■

HOOPS

Belcher Sidelined

After testing injured wrist, Husker senior guard will sit out as medical redshirt

Even with only one good hand, Cookie Belcher could help the Nebraska basketball team. But the senior guard apparently will sit out the remainder of the season as a medical redshirt.

Coach Danny Nee announced after the Cornhuskers' 89-72 loss against intrastate rival Creighton in Omaha in early December that he had decided Belcher should redshirt.

Nee said he made the decision at halftime of the Creighton game.

"I'm not putting him out there like that," Nee told reporters afterward.

Belcher started and played 30 minutes in the game, scoring a team-high 16 points, despite having to rely on his left hand to shoot, and contributing three rebounds and four assists.

But "he can't go on doing that," said Nee.

Belcher did it again two days later, however, leading Nebraska to a 69-57 victory against Pittsburgh at the Devaney Sports Center. Though he scored only two points, he contributed a career-high 10 assists, nine rebounds, two blocked shots and two steals, also in 30 minutes of action.

Belcher makes a "big difference," said Larry Florence, the Cornhuskers' only other senior.

Speculation was, Belcher would play in home games against San Francisco on Dec. 20 and Oral Roberts on Dec. 22 before sitting down for the remainder of the season.

NCAA rules allow a player to petition for a medical redshirt if he or she appears in 20 percent or fewer of a team's games. The Pittsburgh game was Belcher's fourth this season.

Nebraska will play at least 30 games this season, counting the first round of the Big 12 Tournament.

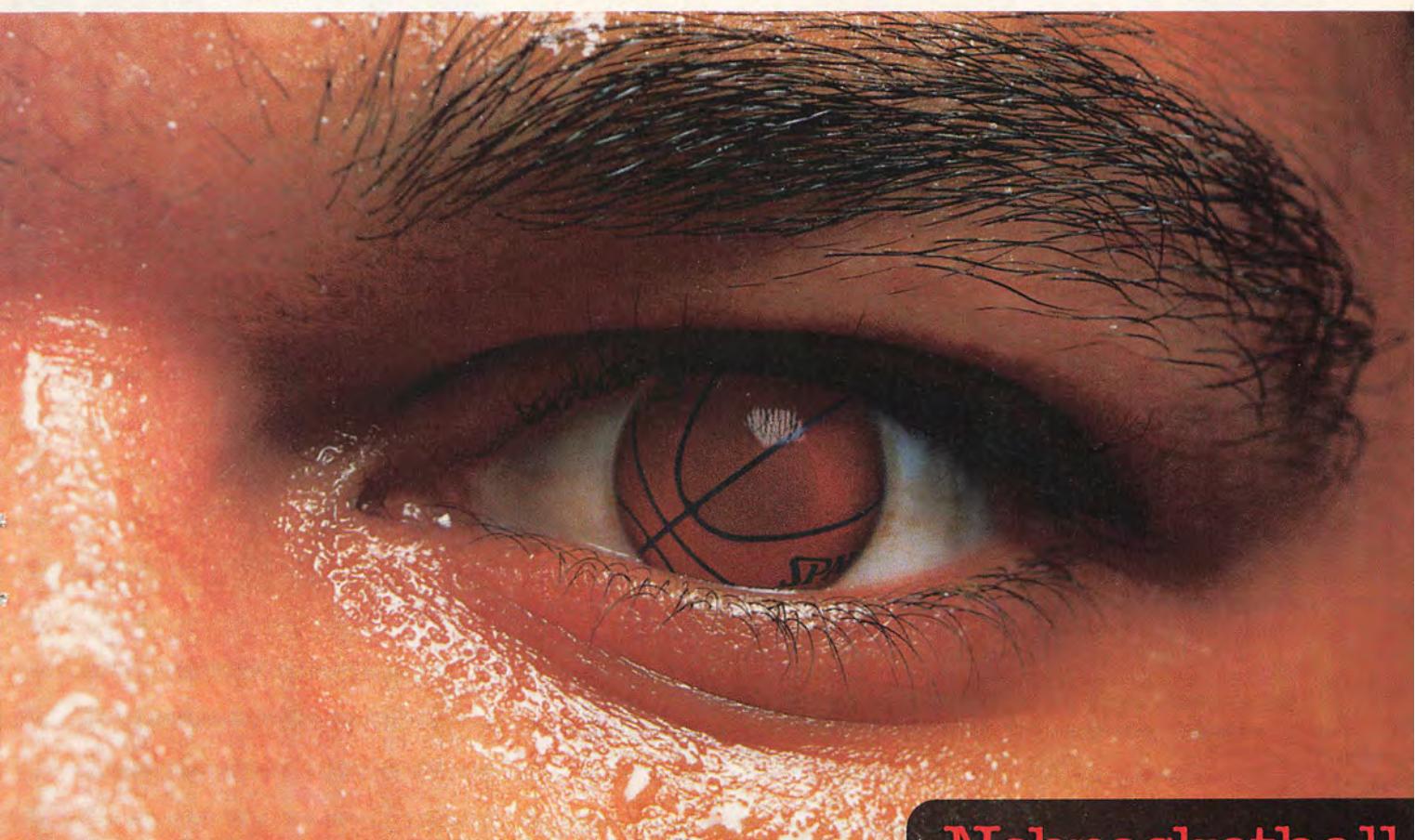
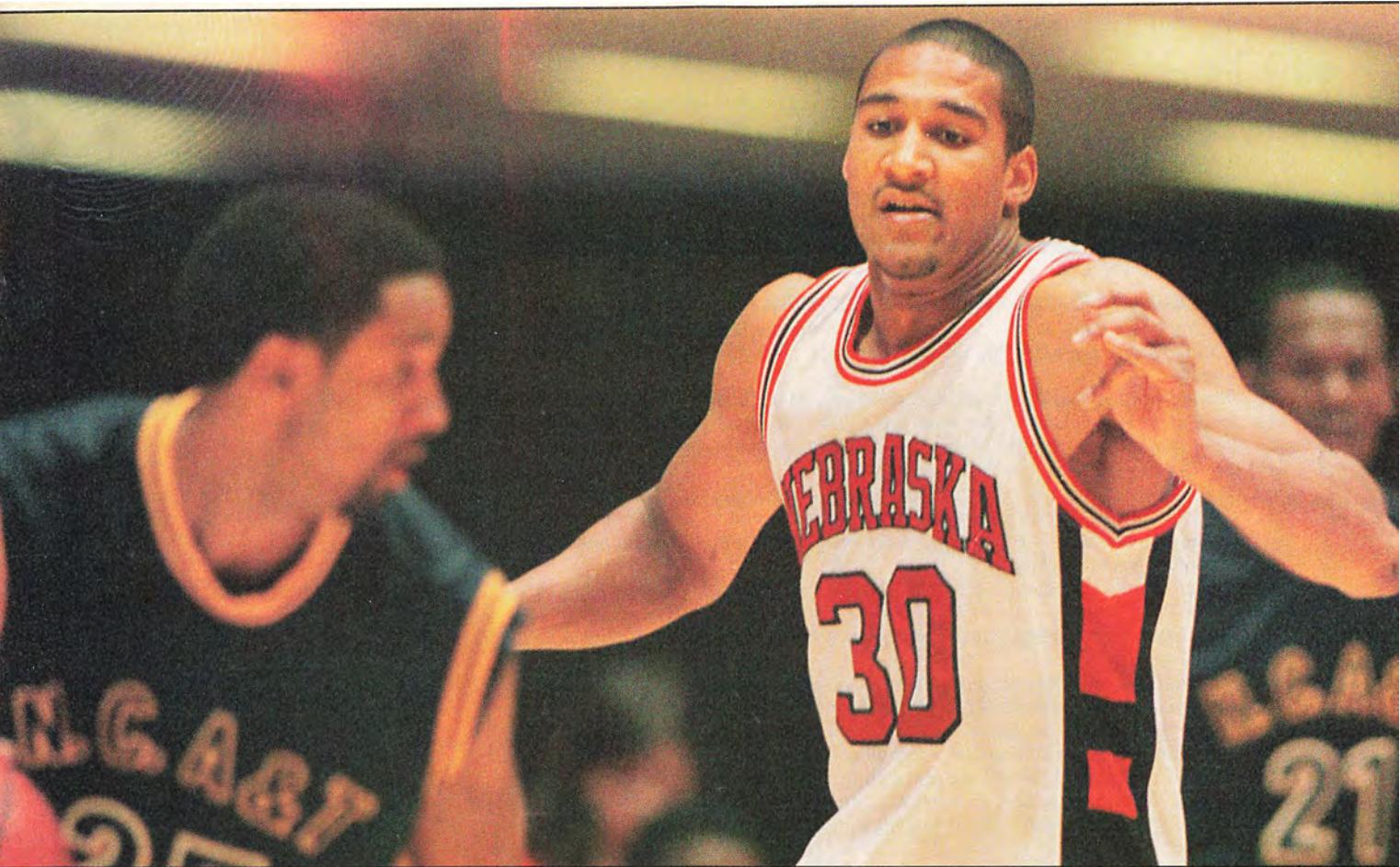
Nee was optimistic going into the season that he would have a healthy Belcher as his big guard and

With seven steals this season, Cookie Belcher is 63 away from the conference career record.

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NEE'S TEAM DEALS WITH GROWING PAINS

Danny Nee's team had to deal not only with the growing pains of a starting lineup that included at least three newcomers but also with other injuries early in the season.

Sophomore guard Cary Cochran sat out a 74-72 upset loss to Western Carolina in the first round of the Ameritas Classic, Nebraska's first loss in the two-day tournament since the championship game of the first Ameritas Classic in 1987. The Cornhuskers lost to Ohio State 72-63.

Nebraska's winning streak in the tournament was 22 games.

In addition to Cochran's absence, senior Larry Florence suffered an ankle sprain and sat out part of the second half, and reserve Ross Buckendahl was sidelined by mononucleosis.

Despite the ankle sprain, Florence scored a career-high 27 points in the game.

Because of the depleted depth at guard, walkon Brian Lahners played in the tournament.

Few people were familiar with Lahners. "You'll have to look in the press guide," Nee said at a news conference prior to the tournament. Lahners was not included in the press guide, however.

Cochran's absence was crucial, according to Nee.

"Without Cary, we lose an important part of our offense," he said.

Every player is important, however, because "we've got a very thin bench," said Nee. "We can't afford fouling out, and we can't be as aggressive on defense."

Cochran returned for the consolation game of the Ameritas Classic and scored 17 points in a 63-47 victory against Monmouth, a school located in West Long Branch, N.J.

Nee's son Patrick went to Monmouth, "so that's how Monmouth got in," Nee said.

Patrick is no longer at the school, however.

Former Cornhusker player and assistant Bill Johnson is an assistant coach at Columbia University, the other team that participated in this year's Ameritas Classic.

NEWCOMERS GET 'ON-THE-JOB TRAINING'

The Cornhusker newcomers have gotten intensive "on-the-job training" during the early non-conference season, according to Nee. The Hoop & Quill Tournament at St. Charles, Mo., in late November provided "a reality check for all our players," he said after they went 1-2.

"I think it will help them get better very quickly."

The newcomers "realize the physicalness," Nee said.

"There's a different level (at which) you have to play."

WOMEN'S TEAM LOSES TALENTED FRESHMAN

Steph Jones, a highly regarded true freshman from Omaha Benson, has been lost for the season with a torn ACL, suffered in the Huskers' 77-69 victory against Creighton.

The injury occurred early in the first half, when Jones went after a loose ball.

Jones had played in all seven games to that point. In order for her to qualify for a medical redshirt, those seven games could be no more than 20 percent of Nebraska's season total. With only 28 games on the schedule, the Huskers would have to advance into post-season play for that to be the case.

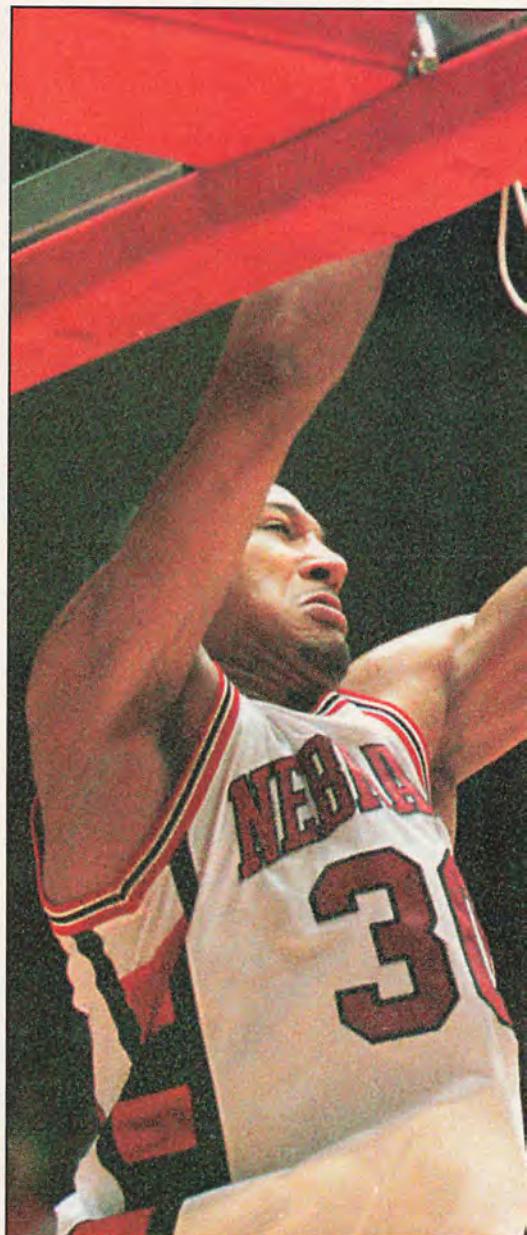
The 6-foot-2 Jones, a high school All-American, had started two games.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HOME-COURT ADVANTAGE?

The Nebraska-Creighton game drew a crowd of 3,742 to the Devaney Sports Center, where Coach Paul Sanderford's Huskers had already lost three times this season.

They lost only one game at home in Sanderford's first two seasons.

The second of the third loss came against Brigham Young, which made 14 three-point shots to hand the Huskers their worst loss (81-57) at the Sports Center since December of 1993. "I haven't raised the white flag, but we're going to have to get this ship righted pretty quickly," Sanderford said. ■



Cookie Belcher started and scored a team-high 16 points in the Huskers' loss to Creighton Dec. 9.

co-captain at least by the time the Cornhuskers began conference play in early January.

"Everything is going along on schedule with the doctors," he said in mid-October.

Nee estimated that Belcher was 75- to 80-percent recovered at the time.

Belcher underwent surgery to repair ligament and cartilage damage in his right wrist in early May, and doctors said they expected the recovery process to take from six to eight months.

The injury originally occurred in high school and was aggravated at Colorado last season.



Belcher wore a cast from his fingertips to the elbow for six weeks and then wore a brace for another six weeks. As a result, he was unable to play basketball during the summer.

His value to the team is inestimable. He was the leading returning scorer, averaging 11.8 points per game last season, and he led the team in assists, steals and three-point shots.

He was second on the team in minutes played per game.

With seven steals this season, Belcher is only 63 from the conference career record, held by Darnell Valentine of Kansas, and 50 from the top 10 on the NCAA career list.

Now he'll have to wait until next season to pursue those reachable marks. ■

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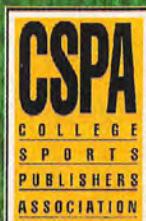
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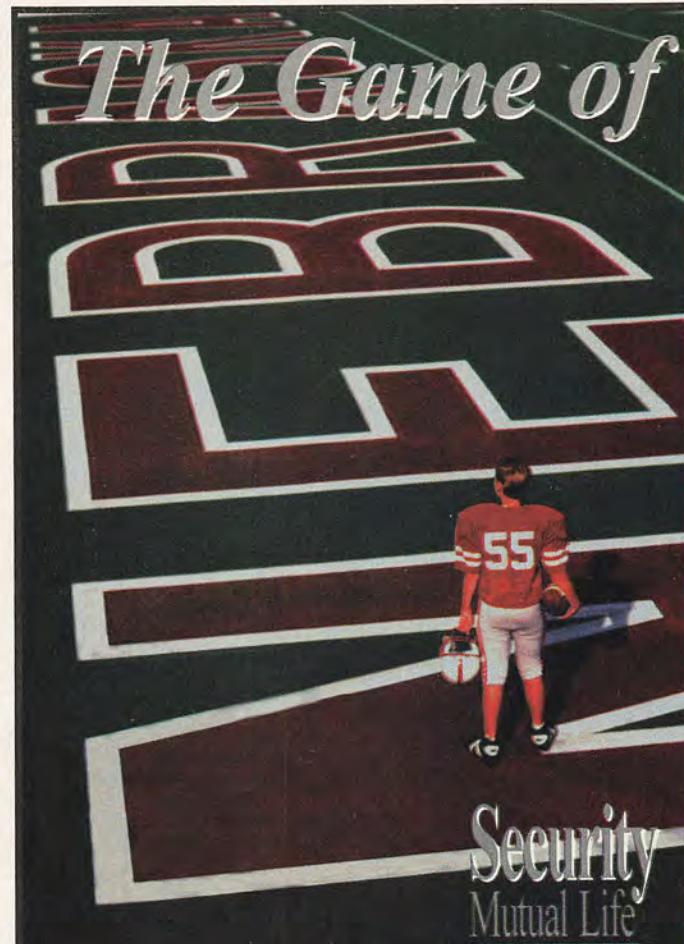
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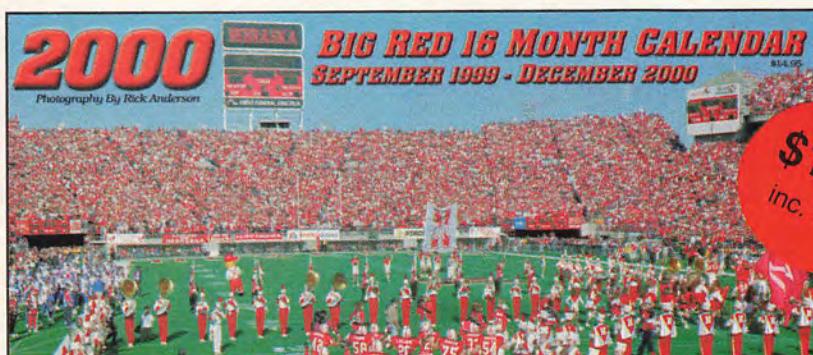
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Pettit Steps Down

After 694 victories, 23-year veteran will assume new post in athletic department

Terry Pettit explained the process of arriving at his decision to step aside as Nebraska's volleyball coach with a metaphor, which should have come as no surprise to those who attended the mid-December news conference in the Don Bryant Media Facility at Memorial Stadium.

The 53-year-old Pettit sees the world in metaphors. He has a poet's sensibility.

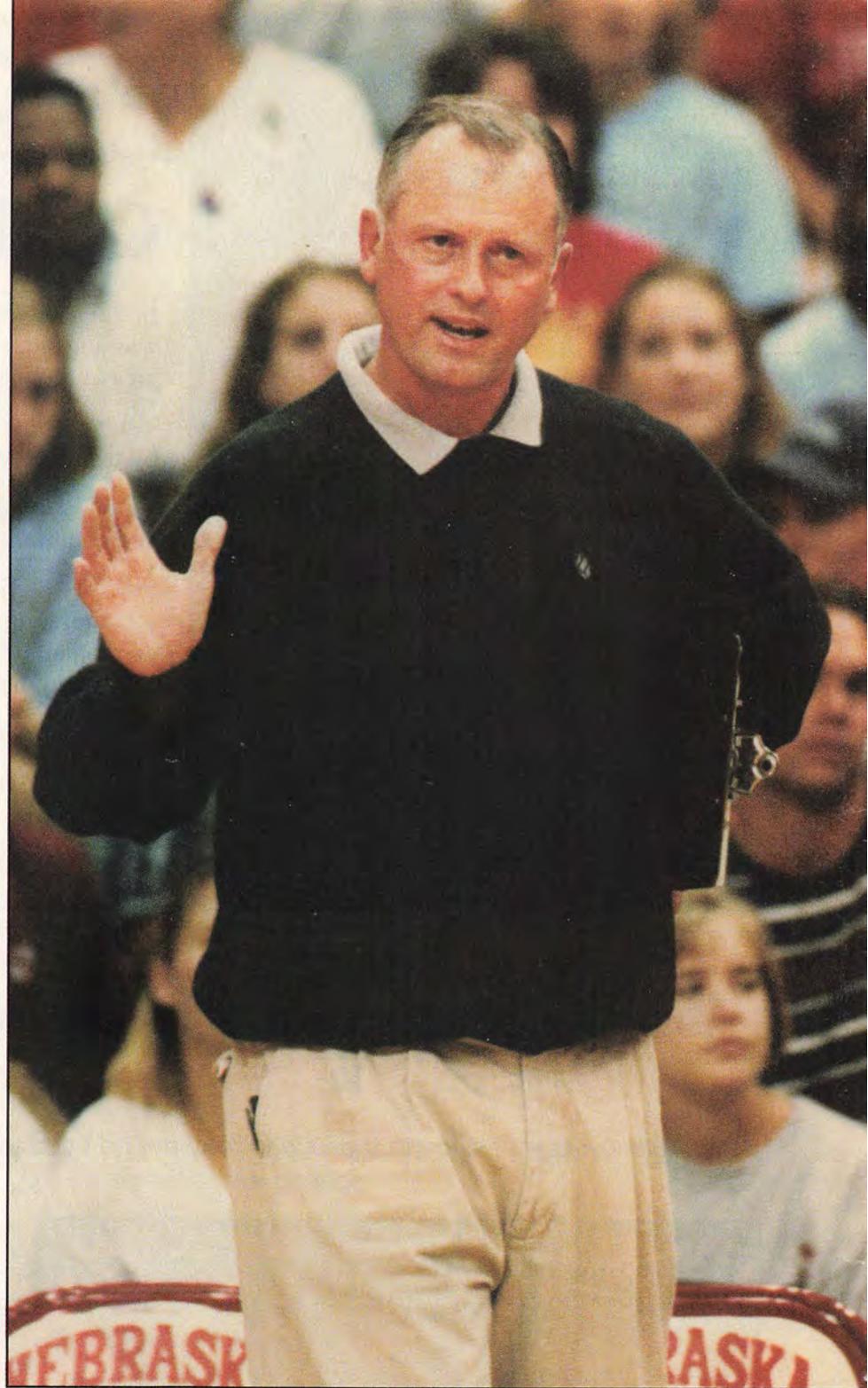
"I'm kind of like one of those Liberian tankers," he said. "It takes about eight miles to turn me."

What he meant by that was, his decision had been shaped over time. "It isn't a matter of one night or one month or whatever," he said. "It's taken several years, really for this decision to evolve."

The unmistakable signs the decision had been made shaded Pettit's final season as head coach. The most significant of those signs was the hiring of John Cook to be his top assistant.

Cook, who coached for Pettit from 1988 to 1991, came back to Nebraska in February, after serving as the head coach at Wisconsin for seven seasons. His return prompted considerable speculation that this could be Pettit's last season — speculation Pettit repeatedly declined to address.

"I understand why people might be curious when we hired John," Pettit said. "But my job here is really



Terry Pettit coached the Huskers to the NCAA championship in 1995 and took them to the finals two other times.

to keep a group of people on task. I ask them every day to come in and focus on the task at hand, not focus on graduate school or what's happening next week or whatever. And I felt it was important to the process, even though I might know where I was going, not to have that become an issue."

The situation was reminiscent of two years ago, when Tom Osborne announced he was stepping aside as

head football coach. "I didn't want to go to the University of Missouri and the University of Oklahoma and have the focus be: This is Terry Pettit's last match at Oklahoma and Missouri," said Pettit.

"I wanted the team to continue to focus, as I was focusing, on what needed to happen."

To approach it otherwise "would have been a disservice to our team."

So he didn't announced his deci-

sion until five days after his 23rd Nebraska team lost to the University of California-Santa Barbara in the NCAA regional semifinals at Palo Alto, Calif.

Pettit, like Osborne, is stepping aside in what some might consider his coaching prime.

His collegiate coaching record is 743-159-11, including a remarkable 694-148-11 at Nebraska. He ranked fifth nationally in winning percentage and sixth in victories.

He coached the Huskers to the NCAA championship in 1995 and took them to the finals two other times. They have played in 18 consecutive NCAA Tournaments, reaching the regional semifinals 16 times, the regional finals 12 times (including five of the last six) and the Final Four six times.

"I could coach another five or 10 years," Pettit said. "I think the team would be successful. But I also believe I need to do what I keep encouraging my players to do. I want to take a risk."

His desire to do that was among three reasons for his decision to step aside, he said.

"The one thing we continually do at Nebraska volleyball is push our players to take risks and sometimes ask them to do things that are uncomfortable and we don't think they can do, or they might not think they can do," said Pettit. "And I think it's important for me to continue to do that."

"To oversimplify things, there are two main talents or strengths that I've brought to this program. One is competitiveness, and the other is creativity. It's a program that probably lives in the former environment the most, in competitiveness. But . . . the creative side is really yearning to get out."

"I think the opportunity (athletic director) Bill (Byrne) has made me will allow that to develop."

Pettit will work with other coaches in the Nebraska athletic department.

His primary reason for stepping aside now, he said, had to do with the program and the opportunity to turn it over to Cook, whom he described as his "most important recruit."

The program will benefit from this change, according to Pettit.

"The most important thing in my mind is Nebraska volleyball," he said. "It's far more important to me than it is that I be coaching Nebraska volleyball. In my own mind, I felt that it was important to enlist the

support of someone that could not just continue what we've done here but make it better."

His physical and emotional well-being also entered into the decision, though they were "maybe less important," he said. "I coach at a passion, and I'm a pretty narrow focused individual."

"It's the only way I know how to coach. When I began coaching about 25 years ago, it would take me about a month to recover and then I would prepare myself mentally for the season.

"The longer I've gone, the longer that recovery has taken, so much so that in the last year or two I would really not recover when we were starting the next season." ■



Assistant John Cook will take over as head coach.



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Waiting Game Worthwhile for Beatrice Back Zajicek

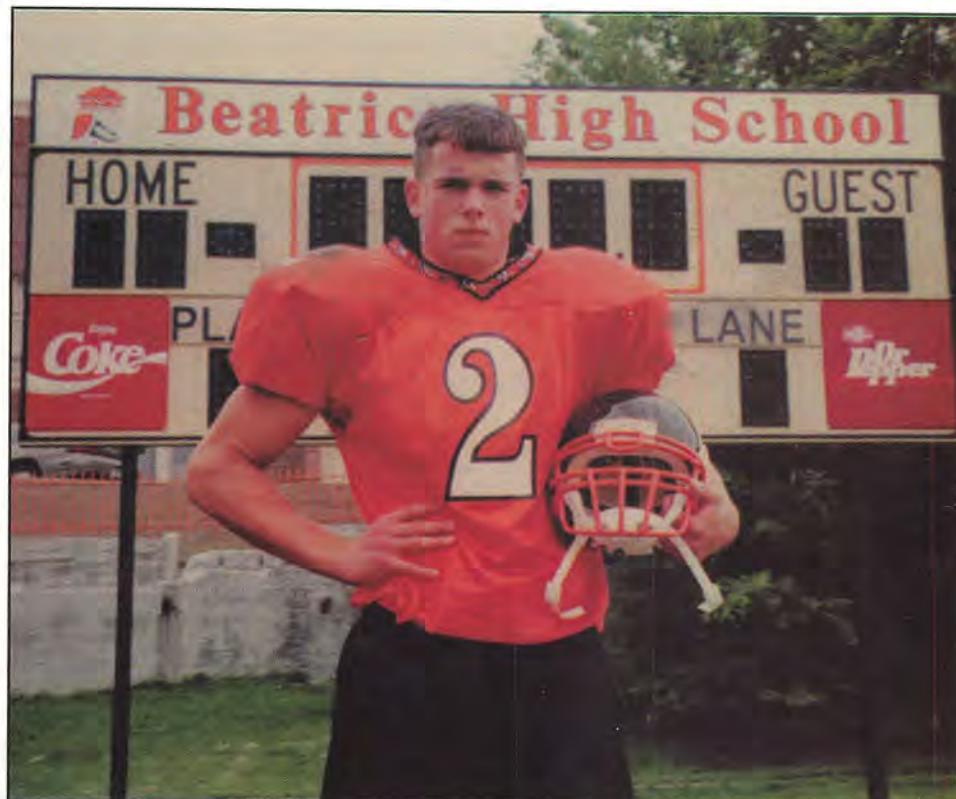
Scholarship offer a dream come true for Nebraska fan

By James Hale

In covering recruiting, it is great to find out a high school athlete has earned the right to play for the school of his dreams. It doesn't always happen that way, certainly at a major power like Nebraska. There are only so many scholarships to give, and many more athletes that want them than free rides available.

Obviously, Nebraska will try to take the top athletes in the state every year. Most of the time, the homegrown athletes that Nebraska offers are clear-cut, no-brainer types of selections. However, there is always an athlete or two in state that the Cornhuskers aren't sure about. That athlete is caught in that twilight zone, when Nebraska isn't sure whether to offer or not. He is an in-state athlete and a darn good one, but is he good enough to earn a precious scholarship at Nebraska?

Athlete Ben Zajicek (6-foot-1, 205 pounds with 4.4 speed in the 40-yard dash) of Beatrice, Neb., was



Ben Zajicek averaged 7.2 yards per carry as a running back at Beatrice High School. He is projected as a wingback at Nebraska.

just such an athlete. Zajicek was always ranked in the top 10 in Nebraska, but not in the top five, and the fact different recruiters

had different ideas on where he might play at the next level wasn't always a positive.

To make matters worse, Zajicek missed three games with an injury but did return in his team's seventh game to show toughness and determination. Zajicek was in a holding pattern with the Huskers, waiting to see if they were going to offer. However, he was running out of time, because he had a scholarship offer from Iowa State. A full-ride, from a major college was waiting for him, and the Cyclones wanted an answer now.

"It came down to the wire, because Iowa State was wanting to know what decision I was going to make," Zajicek said. "So I called up to Nebraska and told them that I needed to know, and they said they were going to look at some more

Nebraska Commitments for 2000

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Jake Andersen	Denver (Mullen)	6-2	305	OL
Thunder Collins	Los Angeles (East L.A. College)	6-2	210	IB
Ira Cooper	Omaha (Westside), Neb.	6-1 1/2	220	LB
Sandro DeAngelis	Buffalo, N.Y. (St. Joseph Coll.)	5-9	195	FB/K
Mike Erickson	Papillion (Papillion-LaVista), Neb.	6-4	260	OL
Martin Flaum	Denver (Northglenn), Colo.	6-5	280	OL
Steve Kriewald	North Loup-Scotia	5-11	250	FB
DeWayne Long Jr.	West Des Moines (Dowling) Iowa	6-1	205	RB
Lornell McPherson	Omaha (Central), Neb.	5-11	175	DB/WB
Ross Pilkington	Loveland, Colo.	6-1	175	WR
Nick Povendo	Keller, Texas	6-5	285	OG
Jason Richenberger	Liberty, Mo.	6-3	210	LB
Chris Septak	Millard (West), Neb.	6-4	235	TE
Ben Zajicek	Beatrice, Neb.	6-1	205	WR/DB

tape. I was told that the whole coaching staff was going to look it over.

"Then the following week, Coach Dan Young told me to call Coach Solich, and when I did, he told me that he felt that I was worth a scholarship. He said Coach Darlington was the only coach left to look over the film and said they would call my coach back within an hour. I happened to be there in the office when they called and said they were offering me a scholarship. I couldn't believe it and couldn't have been happier."

Zajicek said the scholarship offer made all his dreams come true.

"I grew up in Nebraska, and every little kid in Nebraska looks at the program like it is heaven," he said. "I grew up a Nebraska fan, and the players are basically treated as gods. The atmosphere is fantastic, and Nebraska fans are the greatest in America. You won't find better fans. They have great tradition, and their coaching staff is really nurturing. I really couldn't find a better program as for making my decision. It has been a dream of mine to go there."

"I will probably play wingback because they want me on the offensive side of the ball."

As a running back, Zajicek rushed for 581 yards at 7.2 yards per carry. He can bench press 315 pounds, squat 505 and power clean 365. His coach believes Zajicek has all the athletic skills necessary to be an excellent player at Nebraska.

"Ben has excellent size, speed and strength, plus an excellent work ethic to go with his skills," Beatrice Coach Jim Jensen said. "We probably played him out of position at running back. He really is a better receiver, and that is where Nebraska wants to play him, I believe. He is a physical player, who can make people miss, but he would rather run over them."

While the Cornhuskers picked up a commitment from Zajicek, they lost one from offensive lineman Josh Plisch of Rothschild, Wis. Plisch was one of the first athletes to commit to the Cornhuskers in the late summer, but now he has decided to go to Minnesota and play alongside his brother.

As always, the Huskers look to have most of their recruiting wrapped up by the time they head to Tempe, Ariz., to face Tennessee in the Jan. 2 Fiesta Bowl.

Free safety Albert Hollis (6-0,

Longhorns Grab Louisiana Players

The recruiting sweeps are underway in earnest, and most of the major prospects across the country are taking their first or second official visits.

Texas continues to be the Big 12 team making the most noise, as the Longhorns are on pace to have the top class in the conference, a top-five class nationally and could pull in the top recruiting class in the country.

The Longhorns shocked new LSU Coach Nick Saban recently, when All-America defensive tackle Steve Lee (6-4, 308, 5.1) and All-American defensive back Phillip Geiggar (5-9, 200, 4.4) both of Shreveport (Evangel), La., committed to Texas.

When you include All-America quarterback Brock Berlin, Evangel has three of the top five players in Louisiana, and none of them stayed in state at LSU. Berlin committed earlier to Florida.

The commitment of Lee, along with early oral commitments from All-Americans Adam Dorion of Duncan, Okla., Marcel Moses of Texas City, Texas, and Sonny Davis of Austin (Lanier), Texas, gives the Longhorns the best class of defensive linemen in the country. Lee, Davis and Moses are defensive tackle prospects, while Dorion is a defensive end.

The Longhorns are still very much in the picture for two of the top 20 players in the country. Linebacker D.J. Williams of Concord (DeLaSalle), Calif., was scheduled to visit Texas in December. Running back Marcus Houston of Denver (Jefferson) was also scheduled to visit Austin, along with his teammate, All-America linebacker Aurmon Satchell.

Colorado's instate recruiting fortunes are beginning to pick up, as the Buffaloes snagged All-America quarterback Craig Ochs (6-3, 200, 4.55) of Boulder (Fairview) and All-America linebacker Sean Tufts (6-5, 215, 4.65) of Englewood. Ochs is rated the second best quarterback in Colorado. Tufts lost his senior season to an ACL knee injury, but his rehabilitation is ahead of schedule.

The Buffaloes did lose out on junior college All-America quarterback Daniel Cobb of Butler County (Kan.) Community College, who committed to Auburn, but they are still in the hunt for running back Rudi Johnson, who scored seven touchdowns for Butler County in its winning bowl appearance.

Oklahoma State is sky high about the recent commitment of All-America running back Tatum Bell of DeSoto, Texas. Bell is rated as one of the top five running back prospects in the country and, until recently, was thought to be leaning toward Nebraska. However, he had a great in-home visit with OSU Coach Bob Simmons and committed to the Cowboys before he left.

The Cowboys also earned a commitment from offensive lineman Jed Newkirk (6-5, 300, 5.1) of Ft. Scott (Kan.) Community College.

All-America defensive tackle Greg Pauly of Waukesha (South), Wis., recently committed to Notre Dame over Nebraska and Wisconsin.

All-America running back Tyson Thompson of Irving (Nimitz), Texas, did the expected recently and committed to Texas Christian.

Missouri picked up its fifth commitment from athlete Brooke Harvey (6-3, 188, 4.5) of Jefferson City, Mo. Harvey is ranked as one of the top 15 players in Missouri. ■

195, 4.4) of Sacramento, Calif., is a Top-100 national athlete who was scheduled to visit Nebraska in December. However, the Huskers will have to overcome the Texas Longhorns to sign him.

"I would say right now, my leader is Texas over Georgia, Notre Dame and Nebraska," Hollis said. "I have not taken all my visits and have never seen Nebraska. They have such a great program that I want to make sure that I am making the right decision. I want to give them a good look."

Linebacker Bernard Thomas (6-4, 220, 4.81) of Mountain View (St. Francis), Calif., was also scheduled to visit. Nebraska and Michigan are still the top two schools for Thomas, who could wind up at rush end or defensive end in college.

"My situation is still the same as it was a couple of weeks ago," Thomas said. "I am looking forward to my visit to both schools, and after they are over, I should know where I want to go."

It looks like the Huskers have lost out on defensive tackle Vince Feula (6-4, 285, 5.1) of LaMirada,

Calif. Feula visited Arizona recently and almost committed before coming home. He still has a visit set to BYU and is also considering Hawaii and San Diego State, leaving Nebraska out in the cold.

All-American defensive tackle Jamaal Brown (6-7, 310, 4.9) of Lawton (MacArthur), Okla., is still considering Nebraska after visiting Lincoln, Kentucky and Oklahoma. He has visits to Tennessee and UCLA remaining.

Running back Diamond Ferri (5-10, 195, 4.45) of Everett, Mass., is a talented athlete who broke all kinds of records in his hometown. An athlete with incredible moves, Ferri has narrowed his choices down to the Huskers, Syracuse and Tennessee.

"Man, Nebraska is one of the top programs in the country, and they tell me they need more tailbacks in the program," Ferri said. "I love their offense, and Nebraska is always going to feature the tailback. I don't know if they have a break-away threat at tailback right now, and maybe I can be that guy for them.

"Right now, Nebraska is at the

top of my list, and I can't wait to take my visits."

The Huskers have lost out on free safety Larry Stevens (6-4, 235, 4.6) of Tacoma, Wash., who committed to Washington. However, another highly regarded free safety, Marvin Godbolt (6-2, 175, 4.5) of San Antonio (Taft), Texas, has narrowed his choices to Nebraska, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Kansas.

Ja'Maine Billups (6-0, 200, 4.5) of Omaha (Central), Neb., remains the lone in-state standout still not committed to the Huskers. Billups appears to be leaning to Nebraska but still wants to be recruited.

"I just haven't made up my mind yet, and I want to be totally sure what I am doing and where I am going," Billups said. "I like both Iowa schools, too, and want to visit Michigan.

"I wouldn't be surprised if I eventually wind up at Nebraska, but I want to be certain that I am making the right decision."

Linebacker T.J. Hollwell (6-1, 210, 4.5) of Copperas Cove, Texas, still has his eye on Oklahoma, Texas A&M and Nebraska. ■

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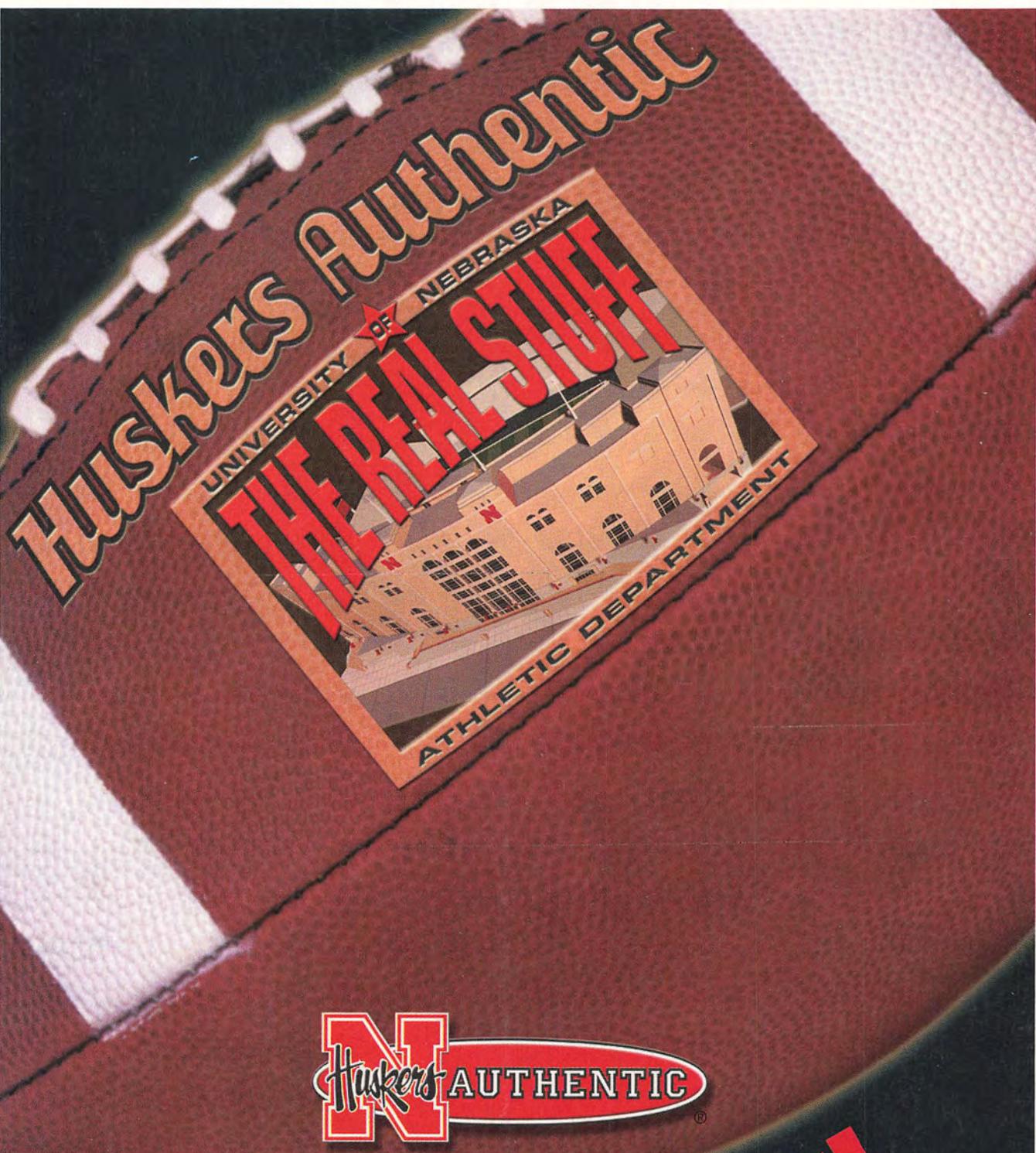
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